

THE HOLOCAUST IN HUNGARY

Seventy Years Later

Edited by
RANDOLPH L. BRAHAM
and
ANDRÁS KOVÁCS



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Foreword

Historians have already demonstrated that the Holocaust in Hungary represented a unique chapter in the singular history of the Final Solution of the “Jewish question” in Europe. In the fifth year of the Second World War—two years after the decision at the Wannsee Conference on January 20, 1942—Hungary still had a Jewish population of approximately 800,000, including close to 100,000 converts who were identified as Jews under the laws then in effect. Although this large and relatively intact Jewish community was deprived of its basic rights as citizens, had suffered close to 62,000 casualties, had been confronted with the hardships of discrimination, and had endured the vicissitudes of a military-related labor service system, it continued to enjoy the physical protection of the aristocratic-conservative regime that ruled Hungary until the German occupation on March 19, 1944. How was all this possible? And if all this *was* possible until March 1944, why could it not continue for a few more months? When the Germans occupied Hungary, all signs clearly indicated that the Germans and their allies would lose the war within a relatively short time. Was it really inevitable that hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews would, within a few months, become victims of the gas chambers of Auschwitz? Could the Holocaust in Hungary have been averted and who were responsible for the violent deaths of over a half a million Hungarian Jews in the ghettos, on the deportation trains, in the extermination and concentration camps, during the death marches, and the mass shootings into the Danube?

Nowadays it seems strange to realize that Hungarian historians began to seriously deal with these questions only after the 1980s. Since then,

however, a consistently active and productive debate has been waged about the history and interpretation of the Holocaust in Hungary. In addition to historians, the debate has been joined by representatives of other scientific disciplines and, with the passage of time, naturally more and more questions have been raised in connection with the memorialization of the Holocaust. The fruit of the historical debates and the results of the scholarly investigations since the late 1980s have partially been revealed in the collective volumes that were published soon after the several decennial conferences that were held since 1984. This volume—the fourth in the series—is an outgrowth of two jointly planned international conferences in commemoration of the seventieth anniversary of the Holocaust in Hungary that were held in Washington, DC, and in Budapest on March 19 and April 6, 2014, respectively. The former was organized and sponsored by the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Rosenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies of the City University of New York; the latter by the Jewish Studies Program of the Central European University in Budapest.

This volume includes the revised and updated versions of twelve selected scholarly papers, thematically organized under four interrelated headings. The first study is by András Kovács, the organizer of the Budapest-based conference and coeditor of this volume. It provides a scholarly overview of the newest trends in the study of the Holocaust in Hungary. His study focuses on the scholarly debates that have been going on since the early 1980s. Under the second heading—*The Path to the Holocaust*—the volume includes three interrelated studies that reflect on the anti-Jewish policies of Hungary during the interwar period—policies which in retrospect appear to have paved the ground for the disaster in 1944. The first study in this group is by Ignác Romsics. His study offers a well-documented overview of the antisemitic views and policies of Count István Bethlen, the prime minister of Hungary from 1921 to 1932. Mária M. Kovács investigates the relationship between the *numerus clausus* and the anti-Jewish legislation of the 1930s. The last study in this group is authored by Victor Karady. The paper contributes to the ongoing debate about possible connections between pre-World War I developments of antisemitism and the process of Nazification in the inter-war years. By analyzing a set of empirical indicators and the alterations in Jewish-Gentile relations in various domains since the turn of the century, he states that the continuity thesis can be empirically demonstrated for Hungary. The five studies in the third section—*The Age of Persecution*—dealing with

the Holocaust era in Hungary shed light on several aspects of the tragedy of Hungarian Jewry which has not yet been fully explored by historians. The first study in this group, by László Csósz, offers new insights into the origins and development of the wartime labor service system of Hungary. Krisztián Ungváry examines the decision-making process that led to the deportations, the German expectations brought to bear on Hungary, and the options left open to the Hungarian government. Zoltán Tibori Szabó then addresses the Holocaust in Transylvania. The next study in this segment is by Péter Tibor Nagy, who identifies the main sociological factors that determined the various chances for survival in Budapest during the Holocaust era. Finally, Rebecca Klein-Plejšová examines the experience of Hungarian Jewish refugees in the Displaced Person camps and centers in Austria after the end of the war.

The final section of this volume—*The Memory of the Holocaust*—includes four studies focusing on various national and international aspects of Holocaust remembrance. The first study is by Gábor Gyáni, who traces the history and evolution of the various forms of Holocaust remembrance, differentiating between the various phases of regime and governmental changes in Hungary since the end of the Second World War. The study by Monika Kovács offers a comparative overview of local and global forms of Holocaust remembrance. She also provides a social-psychological analysis of the group-based emotions engendered by Holocaust remembrance as reflected by the emotional needs of the descendants of the victims and of the bystanders alike. The next study in this section is by Andrea Pető, who explores the way in which survivors of the Hungarian chapter of the Holocaust and participants in postwar trials remember the legal processes of those trials. The analysis is based on video testimonies collected by the Visual History Archive. The last article in this volume is by Randolph L. Braham, its coeditor. His study provides a historical overview of the attitudes and reactions of the various Hungarian governmental, state, and political figures to the tragedy that had befallen the Jews of Hungary during the Second World War. The study offers a differentiation between their reactions and attitudes in terms of the various phases in postwar Hungarian history, concluding that the official leaders of the country have not yet *really* come to grips with the Holocaust.

As editors of this volume we have not striven to publish studies representing any particular point of view. On the contrary, we found it important to represent a variety and even contrasting views and interpretations. Needless to say, the views and interpretations expressed by the authors are theirs alone and do not necessarily reflect those of the editors or of the

institutions that sponsored the conferences and supported the publication of this volume.

We would first like to express our thanks to the contributors for sharing the fruit of their research and thereby advancing the cause of Holocaust studies. We would also like to express our gratitude to the sponsors and supporters of the international conferences. For the support of the Budapest-based International Conference, we would like to thank Dr. John Shattuck, Rector and President of the Central European University. The organizing of the Budapest conference could not have been realized without the help of Ágnes Kelemen, Ildikó Morán, and Ildikó Rull.

For the success of the International Conference that was held in Washington, DC, we would like to express our thanks to Sara Bloomfield, the director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and to Dr. Paul Shapiro, director of the Museum's Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies. Special thanks are due to Benton Arnovitz, the director of academic publications of the museum, for his superb editorial contributions. We would also like to express our appreciation to Professor Mary J. Maudsley for her invaluable editorial suggestions and moral support, and to Leah Wolfson, Robert Ehrenreich, David Stolte, Chandra Subramaniam, and Joshua Blinder for their care in organizing the conference. We would also like to acknowledge the support by the Rosenthal Institute of Holocaust Studies. First and foremost, we would like to express our special thanks to Gábor Várszegi for his consistently generous support for the advancement of Holocaust-related studies and research programs at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. We express our gratitude to the many supporters of the Rosenthal Institute, especially to Elizabeth and Jack Rosenthal, Anne and Gabriel Newmark, Sheba and Jacob Gruber, and David Edrich. Finally, we would like to express our appreciation to Andrew T. Gane, Tamas Foti, Szabolcs László, Ed Hatton, and Vera Köböl without whose professional editorial contributions this volume could not have been published.

January 2016

Randolph L. Braham
András Kovács

I. INTRODUCTION

Hungarian Intentionalism: New Directions in the Historiography of the Hungarian Holocaust

András Kovács

The present debate on the causes of, and possible historical explanations for, the Hungarian Holocaust is reminiscent of the polemic that arose between two groups of historians of Nazism—the so-called intentionalists and functionalists—more than thirty years ago. As we know, the essence of that debate was whether the Holocaust had been a deliberate aim of the anti-semitic policies pursued by the Nazi leadership (principally Hitler) from the time of their inception or whether—as the functionalists argued—it was the resultant of impersonal institutional processes and conflicts, none of which were deliberately planned.¹ According to the intentionalists, the Nazis' Jewish policy—which culminated in mass murder—was an end in itself. Even

¹ Leading representatives of the “intentionalist” school of thought are Eberhard Jäckel, Saul Friedländer, Lucy Dawidowitz, and Daniel Goldhagen, while notable “functionalists” include Martin Broszat, Hans Mommsen, and Raul Hilberg. For more details on the debate, see Martin Broszat and Saul Friedländer, “Um die ‘Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus’. Ein Briefwächsel,” *Vierteljahrshefte der Zeitgeschichte* 36.2 (1988): 339–72; Timothy Mason, “Intention and Explanation: A Current Controversy about the Interpretation of National Socialism,” in *The Nazi Holocaust, Part 3, The “Final Solution”: The Implementation of Mass Murder*, ed. Michael Marrus (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1989), 3–20; Richard Bessel, “Functionalists versus Intentionalists: The Debate Twenty Years On or Whatever Happened to Functionalism and Intentionalism?” *German Studies Review* 26.1 (2003): 15–20; Eberhard Jackel and Jürgen Rohwer, eds., *Der Mord an den Juden im zweiten Weltkrieg. Entschlussbildung und Verwirklichung* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1994); Adi Gordon, Amos Morris Reich, and Amos Goldberg, “An Interview with Hans Mommsen: The ‘Functionalist’ and the ‘Intentionalist’ Schools of Thought,” Shoah Resource Center of Yad Vashem, December 12, 1997, http://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%203850.pdf.

when required to divert resources from the realization of the Reich's military and political goals, the Nazis sought blindly to implement the policy in the most effective manner (the Holocaust in Hungary being a case in point). For their part, the functionalists argued that only a small part of German society—around 10 percent of the population—had been infected by antisemitism, and so what needs explanation is how the Holocaust could have occurred in spite of this circumstance. Thus, in their case, we need to understand and explain how it was possible that so many people among the non-antisemitic majority became executors, supporters or at least passive observers of the antisemitic policies culminating in mass murder.

The debate, however, addressed not only the narrow subject matter—explanations for the Holocaust—but also a more abstract issue of historiographical approach. The functionalists, many of whom belonged to the leftist camp and whose scholarship had been greatly influenced by Marxist structuralist explanations of historical and social phenomena, accused the intentionalists of reverting to Romanticist historiography.

The intentionalist attack on the incorporation of functionalist types of explanation into our understanding of National Socialism proposes, implicitly but clearly, a retreat by the historical profession to the methods and stance of Burckhardt.... Burckhardt saw the historian's task as to investigate, to classify and to order, to hate, to love, and to warn—but not except upon the smallest of scales, to explain. This approach had almost no explanatory power at all. The attempt at explanation in any and all of the various different traditions of rationalist historiography seems to have been put to one side in intentionalist writing on National Socialism.²

Meanwhile, the intentionalists contended that the functionalists had set off on a misguided and morally unacceptable path: to "historicize" and "normalize" Nazism means, they argued, to trivialize it. Indeed, in the intentionalists' view, if one played down the ideological dimensions of National Socialism, this would lead to apologies for Nazism, to the neglect of the moral problems related to National Socialist rule, and to the avoidance of such issues as historical culpability and individual responsibility.

² Tim Mason, "Intention and Explanation: A Current Controversy about the Explanation of National Socialism," in *Der "Führerstaat": Mythos und Realität. Studien zur Struktur und Politik des Dritten Reiches*, ed. Gerhard Hirschfeld and Lothar Kettenacker (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), 29.

By the late 1980s, the debate seemed to have subsided. The year 1996, however, saw the publication of Daniel Goldhagen's book *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*,³ a super-intentionalist work, as it was described by a leading functionalist, Hans Mommsen.⁴ With his book Goldhagen stirred up passions once again. His main argument—according to which “eliminationist antisemitism” had arisen in a large part of German society before the Nazi takeover, whereby National Socialism had merely provided an opportunity for its unscrupulous enactment—was rejected by most. Even so, the book and the debate surrounding it contributed to a revival of the intentionalist school of thought. Whereas the functionalists had previously dominated the historical debate on Nazism, in the following years the intentionalists came to the fore: “perpetrator research” (*Täterforschung*) became the main direction of research. A significant number of historical biographies of Nazi leaders and SS chiefs were published, with great emphasis being laid on the antisemitic socialization of the Nazi elite.⁵ In connection with the renowned Hamburg exhibition documenting the Wehrmacht's participation in mass murders, several detailed analyses were published on the antisemitic indoctrination of the German officer corps and the influence of such indoctrination on the behavior of Wehrmacht officers.⁶ In his influential and monumental work, Saul Friedländer,⁷ a major advocate of the intentionalist school, claimed not only that genocide had been made possible by pervasive antisemitism in German society but also that antisemitism was rooted in Christian anti-Judaism. In his view, continuity rather than difference characterized the relationship between traditional and modern antisemitism (and between “moderate” nineteenth-century and “radical” Nazi antisemitism). This train of thought was further strength-

³ Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).

⁴ Gordon, Reich, and Goldberg, “An Interview with Hans Mommsen.”

⁵ See, among others, Peter Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler: A Life*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Toby Thacker, *Joseph Goebbels: Life and Death* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Herbert Ulrich, *Best. Biographische Studien über Radikalismus, Weltanschauung und Vernunft. 1903–1989* (Bonn: Dietz, 1996); Catherine Epstein, *Model Nazi: Arthur Greiser and the Occupation of Western Poland*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁶ Hannes Heer, *Tote Zonen. Die deutsche Wehrmacht an der Ostfront* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999).

⁷ Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1933–1945*, 2 vols. (New York: HarperCollins, 1997, 2007).

ened by research and publications on the modern blood libels and on the appearance of antisemitic violence in pre-Nazi Germany.⁸

This perceptible change of approach has not, however, provoked a debate similar to the earlier one. “Recently there has been an intermingling of the various schools of thought. In former years, my methodological position differed strongly from that of Christopher Browning or Raul Hilberg. But today these differences are withering away, and the traditional distinction between the intentionalist and the functionalist schools lost much of its relevance,” said Hans Mommsen in a 1997 interview.⁹

In recent years, those scholars that were once identified as functionalists have drawn closer to intentionalism in that they no longer consider the antisemitic measures culminating in the Holocaust to have been exclusively the unintended outcomes of impersonal processes. Rather, they now explain them as the corollary of decisions taken by the central Nazi political leadership with the aim of promoting perceived or real interests. For instance, Götz Aly, one of the best-known German historians of the Nazi persecution of the Jews, characterized the Holocaust in his controversial book, *Hitlers Volksstaat*,¹⁰ as “the most consequential mass murder and robbery of modern history,” referring to the fact that its purpose was to plunder European Jewry in order to relieve German society of the burdens of the war and to maintain support in society for Nazism through a series of social policy measures. Aly does not dispute the presence of antisemitism in German society and among the Nazi leadership. Still, in his view, this alone fails to explain the decisions of Nazi leaders on Jewish issues or society’s attitudes toward Jews, which, Aly believes, were primarily linked with financial and material interests. On the other side, historians attributing the Holocaust in large part to German antisemitism are now more inclined than before to accept the explanatory role of impersonal institutional processes, and they no longer see in this a danger of Nazi apolo-

⁸ See, for example, Johannes Gross, *Ritualmordbeschuldigungen gegen Juden im deutschen Kaiserreich (1871–1914)* (Berlin: Metropol, 2002); Helmut Walser Smith, *The Butcher’s Tale: Murder and Anti-Semitism in a German Town* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2002); Helmut Walser Smith, *The Continuities of German History: Nation, Religion, and Race across the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁹ Gordon, Reich, and Goldberg, “An Interview with Hans Mommsen.”

¹⁰ Available in English translation as Götz Aly, *Hitler’s Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial War, and the Nazi Welfare State*, trans. Jefferson Chase (New York: Henry Holt, 2005).

getics or of the historical exculpation of perpetrators. The German debate of historians seems, therefore, to be moving away from the debates surrounding historical memory—and, above all, historical responsibility—to which it had once been so closely tied.

Opposite trends can be observed behind the increased strength of Hungarian intentionalism. The first serious international debate about the Hungarian Holocaust arose after the publication, in 1982, of Randolph L. Braham's monumental work *The Politics of Genocide*, (which was published in Hungarian only in 1988). Braham posed a simple question and then examined the history of the Hungarian Holocaust from that aspect: Could the murder of hundreds of thousands of Jews have been avoided? The question is a very obvious one. In the fifth year of the war, two years after the fateful decision on the "final solution," more than 800,000 Jews were still alive in Hungary, having been deprived of most of their civil rights and threatened by conscription into forced labor brigades, but nevertheless living in relative physical safety at the very heart of Nazi-occupied Europe. If all of this was possible in March 1944, why could the situation not have remained unchanged for several months more? In March 1944, the Red Army was nearing the country's eastern borders, the Western allies were already fighting in Italy, and the opening of a third front in the West was anticipated. The pressure on the Wehrmacht and on the German economy was increasing. Indeed, there was every indication that Nazi Germany and the Axis powers would shortly lose the war. Under these circumstances, was it really inevitable that in the space of a few months half a million Hungarian Jews should fall victim to the gas chambers of Auschwitz?

Almost without exception, historians of the era agree that in the absence of a German occupation of Hungary most Hungarian Jews would have survived the war. Accordingly, what we really need to ask is this: Could the German occupation of the country have been avoided? The intentionalists' answer is clear: if the main motive for Hitler's wars was the annihilation of the "racial enemy" and if the war was really being fought against the Jews, then Hungary (where even in 1944, hundreds of thousands of Jews were living) had no chance of evading German occupation. Moreover, Hungarian governments had been reluctant to initiate and implement the deportation of Hungary's Jewish population.¹¹ Braham does not share the intentionalist view: according to him, "the Germans' deci-

¹¹ See William O. McCagg, "Genocide in Hungary: An Exchange," *New York Review of Books* 24.9 (1982).

sion to occupy Hungary resulted from a series of complex political/military factors: the unsolved 'Jewish question,' though important, was not the determining one."¹² German policy-makers were motivated first and foremost by strategic goals; as the military situation deteriorated, they sought to ensure the unconditional loyalty and obedience of their allies. They were extremely concerned by political developments in Hungary, in particular the Kállay government's intention to limit the war effort and enter into secret negotiations with the Allies. "Ironically, it appears in retrospect that had Hungary continued to remain a militarily passive but politically vocal ally of the Third Reich instead of provocatively engaging in diplomatic manoeuvres that were essentially fruitless, if not merely aimed at establishing an alibi, the Jews of Hungary might possibly have survived the war relatively unscathed."¹³

Braham's claim—which the New York historian István Deák branded a frightening conclusion¹⁴—provoked much controversy and debate, for it represented a challenge to the contemporary historiography on fascism, collaboration and resistance. It implied, namely, that collaboration with the Germans—at least under certain conditions—would have eased the situation of Hungary's persecuted Jews. Accordingly, historians needed to face the fact that the interest of the Allied powers in a prompt victory did not necessarily coincide with the fundamental Jewish interest in survival. Braham's assertion also implied that one could not regard all the collaborative regimes as equally responsible and to condemn them uniformly for cooperating with the Germans. Rather, it was necessary to establish a kind of yardstick by which to judge the various forms and consequences of collaboration. Hence the question—and the basis of moral judgment—is *not* whether a government collaborated with Nazism but rather when and for what reason did it do so? Did it support German goals only reluctantly and to the minimum extent possible under the circumstances, in order to maintain at least limited sovereignty of the state, or did it identify fully with those goals?

By the late 1980s, in the international literature on the Hungarian Holocaust, there was a growing convergence between positions that highlighted ideological explanations for the German occupation and others

¹² Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary*, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), vol. 1, 362.

¹³ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 225–26.

¹⁴ István Deák, "Could the Hungarian Jews Have Survived?" *The New York Review of Books* 24.1 (1982).

emphasizing practical motives. A consensus seemed to be developing that the immediate cause of the occupation was practical in nature rather than ideological. Germany's political and economic leadership had real fears of a Hungarian exit from the German-led alliance, and it was also seeking to mobilize Hungary's remaining economic and military resources for its own objectives.¹⁵ However, it formulated these pragmatic goals within the ideological context of antisemitic policy. The reluctance of the Hungarian authorities to take a more active part in the war effort was therefore attributed to the presence of a large Jewish population and the influence of the Jewish elite over Hungarian politicians. A further aim, in forcing Hungary's leaders to deport the Jews, was to make them accomplices in the gravest war crime, which would hinder any attempts to negotiate with the Allies.¹⁶ There were, therefore, practical reasons for Germany's occupation of Hungary, and these considerations were directly linked with the German war effort, but in the German view "satisfactory cooperation" also included the physical persecution of Jews. In other words, while the antisemitic ideological obsession was not the cause of the invasion, antisemitism nevertheless served as an explanatory frame for practical measures.

With this the debate on the Hungarian Holocaust entered a new stage. Increasingly, the second question arising from the "frightening conclusion"—an appraisal of the postoccupation collaboration—came to the fore, and the answers given to this question signaled the start of a strong intentionalist wave in Hungarian historiography. Almost everyone agreed—even in the debate on the reasons for the German occupation—that the behavior of the Hungarian state and society greatly influenced the outcome: without Hungarian collaboration the fate of Hungary's Jews might have been different. But to what extent did cooperation influence the outcome, and which were the parties for whom the treatment of Hungarian Jews in the wake of the German occupation ultimately depended? Was their fate dependent primarily on the German occupiers or on the

¹⁵ See Christian Gerlach and Götz Aly, *Das letzte Kapitel. Der Mord an den ungarischen Juden 1944/1945* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlag-Anstalt, 2002), 91–112. A similar argument has already been used by György Ránki, "A németek szerepe a magyar zsidók elpusztításában" [The role of the Germans in the extermination of Hungarian Jews], *História* 6, 4 (1984).

¹⁶ This fact is emphasized in Peter Longerich, *Politik der Vernichtung. Eine Gesamtdarstellung der nationalsozialistischen Judenverfolgung* (Munich: Piper, 1998), 565–70.

collaborating Hungarian government? Can collaboration be seen as fully coerced, and, indeed, as a painful price paid for saving the lives of the Jews of Budapest in July 1944 or was it, on the contrary, a reflection of a strong and active identification with the goal of the Nazis' policy of antisemitism, namely the "final solution"?

Although Braham leaves no doubt that the Hungarian government and society bears a significant responsibility for its collaboration after the German occupation, he nevertheless acknowledges that had the occupation been avoided, it is likely that "the Jews of Hungary might possibly have survived the war relatively unscathed."¹⁷ In his view, after the German occupation, there was no more possibility of saving the Jews. At best, the losses could be minimized. By this time, however, the conservative-aristocratic forces—who rejected the physical persecution of the Jews and continued to nurture the illusion of a possible Hungarian exit from the war—had been squeezed out of Hungary's government and replaced by politicians who willingly acceded to German demands.¹⁸

László Karsai shares the view that while the immediate reason for the occupation was unlikely to have been the deportation and murder of the Jews, this was at least one of the expressed goals. According to Karsai, the order to destroy Hungarian Jewry came directly from Hitler, while its execution was assigned to Himmler and the SS. Only this can explain why such senior members of the SS as Kaltenbrunner, as well as Eichmann and his team of deportation experts, arrived in Hungary in the immediate aftermath of the occupation. The occupation thus sealed the fate of Hungarian Jewry. The responsibility of the Hungarian government after the occupation lies in the fact that when deliberating on the degree to which it should or must collaborate, it assigned no importance at all to efforts to save the Jews, although it still had some room to maneuver, and another course of political action might have reduced the number of victims: for instance, by means of a cautious mix of sabotage and collaboration from the German occupation until the Normandy landings in July 1944 and then, after the landings, through a policy of more determined resistance.

Karsai expressed his position in opposition to the intentionalist argument that had first appeared in Christian Gerlach and Götz Aly's afore-

¹⁷ Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, vol. 1, 226.

¹⁸ Randolph L. Braham, "Magyar, német és zsidó számítások és elszámítások a holokausz utolsó szakaszában" [Hungarian German and Jewish calculations and miscalculations in the final stage of the Holocaust], *Múlt és Jövő* 21.2 (2010): 42–45.

mentioned work and which was subsequently formulated in clearer terms by Gerlach in a lecture at a conference marking the sixtieth anniversary of the Holocaust.¹⁹ Gerlach argued that while Germany's occupation of Hungary had indeed been inevitable, the consequences of the occupation for the country's Jews were far less unequivocal. According to Gerlach and Aly, the German occupiers had not arrived in Hungary with fixed ideas about what should happen to the country's Jewish population. They had not even decided whether all Hungarian Jews should be deported. Possibly—at least for a temporary period—it might have been sufficient for them (as in Poland before 1942) to confiscate all Jewish property, to round up a large number of Jewish forced laborers, and to implement the complete separation of the Jewish and non-Jewish populations—that is, their ghettoization and the establishment of local concentration camps within Hungary. "Aly and Gerlach's 'innovation,' according to which the Germans would have been satisfied initially with 50–100,000 Jewish forced laborers and the Hungarian government itself 'extorted' the deportation of the Jews in the course of some kind of 'interactive' and 'multiphase' decision-making process, is nothing other than baseless speculation and a harsh accusation," wrote Karsai.²⁰

Aly and Gerlach's claim was that the fate of the Jews had been determined by the attitude and behavior of the Hungarian authorities and Hungarian society rather than by the fact of the occupation. In their view, the Germans could not have known in advance how the Hungarian authorities, the populace and important sections of the elite might react to any attempts to deport the Jews. They argued that the Germans would have abandoned the plan for total deportation if they had sensed strong passive resistance within Hungarian society. The decision to destroy Hungarian Jewry in its entirety was taken only once the Germans had become convinced of the willingness of the Hungarian authorities to collaborate and of the unlikelihood of serious resistance on the part of Hungarian society. It follows from Aly and Gerlach's position that a large part of the Jewish population might have survived the German occupation if the Hungarians had *refused to collaborate* with the country's occupiers.

¹⁹ Christian Gerlach, "A magyar zsidóság deportálásának döntéshozatali mechanizmusa" [The decision-making process of the deportation of Hungarian Jewry], in *A holokauszt Magyarországon európai perspektívában*, ed. Judit Molnár (Budapest: Balassa Kiadó, 2005), 469–78.

²⁰ László Karsai, "A holokauszt utolsó fejezete" [The last chapter of the Holocaust], *Beszélő* 10.10 (2005).

Gábor Kádár and Zoltán Vági, on the basis of new documents (primarily the writings of László Endre), argue that Aly and Gerlach's theory is verifiable. In their view, the fate of the Hungarian Jews was determined by the fact that after the German occupation radical antisemites held, or came to hold, the key positions that proved decisive for the formulation and implementation of government policy toward Jews. In actual fact, Kádár and Vági apply the "cumulative radicalization" theory of the functionalists to Hungarian conditions. According to their analysis, at every stage on the path to mass deportation there arose obstacles—"bottlenecks"—which might have halted the process. Owing, however, to the decisions of radical antisemites in key positions, events took an increasingly disastrous turn.²¹

Krisztián Ungváry's position is very similar. Whereas Kádár and Vági focus on a subjective factor—the antisemitic convictions of key decision-makers—Ungváry concludes, in the course of an analysis of the room for maneuver and decision options of the German and Hungarian authorities, that the fate of the Jews depended ultimately on the Hungarian decision-makers, but not only on those who occupied leading positions. According to Ungváry, "cumulative radicalization" cannot only be explained by the fact that such well-known extreme antisemites as Endre and Baky came to hold top positions in the Hungarian executive, playing a crucial role in the deportations. A similarly important factor had been that this mentality characterized every level of the state apparatus. "As to who was responsible for these events, the unavoidable conclusion is that the Hungarian authorities bear the main responsibility. Evidently, the primary responsibility lies with László Endre, but, on his own, he would have been unable to deport a single Jew. He needed a zealous bureaucracy and a well-oiled Hungarian public administration. In addition to the gendarmerie, the required collaborators included a wide range of state employees from the staff of county orphan agencies to female body-friskers. According to estimates, the deportation process gave some kind of official task to 200,000 people or so."²² Ungváry gives the most succinct summary of the intentionalist position:

²¹ Gábor Kádár and Zoltán Vági, *A végső döntés* [The final decision] (Budapest: Jaffa Kiadó, 2013), 146ff. and 191ff.

²² In this volume, 144–145.

After the German occupation, the Hungarian government—if it wished to remain in place—clearly had no other option but to introduce restrictions on the Jewish population. Yet the Germans did not prescribe the exact nature of the required measures. The Hungarian government might have decided merely to launch an expanded “police action against migrants” or, by establishing concentration camps, it might have deported only the nonassimilated Jews of the Sub-Carpathian region. By the same token, it might have opted to deport Hungary’s entire Jewish population, including the Jews of Budapest. The final choice of the country’s leaders reflects upon the quality (or lack thereof) of Hungarian politics and public life.²³

The new intentionalist position revises the argument made by, among others, Braham and Karsai, according to which the mass murder of Hungarian Jews was the direct consequence of the German occupation, as the Germans entered the country with the express intention of destroying the Jewish population—even if this was not the primary motive for the occupation. The deportations could not have been accomplished so effectively without Hungarian collaboration, but this factor only influenced the extent of the destruction. In contrast, according to the new intentionalists, the German occupiers would have been satisfied with much less: indeed, if the matter had depended on them alone, the deportations might never have taken place. Hungarian antisemites were the ones who radicalized the Germans’ vague plans. They persuaded the occupiers of the viability of deporting the entire Jewish population, and they created the political and logistical conditions required for implementation of the plan. This argument inverts the notion of Hungarian responsibility: it was not the Hungarian collaborators who assisted the Nazis in accomplishing their goals, but rather the German occupation that enabled Hungarian antisemites to realize their own long-cherished plans. “[T]he resettlement of the Jewish population had been sought uniformly by a majority of Hungary’s domestic political forces—above all the governing party and the extreme right—ever since 1939. Indeed, their petitions and bills in this regard had only been stalled [by the governing aristocratic elite] through the intentional obstruction of the work of the legislature, the adjournment

²³ In this volume, 146.

of Parliament and other rather drastic means,” Ungváry writes.²⁴ Thus, while the German occupiers might have been inclined to subordinate their Jewish policy to pragmatic considerations, for the Hungarian antisemitic politicians the primary goal was the “de-Judification” (*Entjudung*) of the country, whereby rational political considerations were brushed aside. Rather than claim that the objective of the Hungarian antisemitic politicians was the physical destruction of the Jews, the intentionalists state that their aim—in the realization of which they could count on the support of a large part of society—was to plunder the Jews and, by whatever means, achieve their expulsion from the country. Prior to the German occupation they had intended to achieve this aim by means of legislation. After the German invasion, however, they saw the occupation as a shortcut to achieving their goal, which would also save them from having to do the dirty work.

According to the new intentionalists, the Hungarian Holocaust was the endpoint, the final station in a historical journey lasting several decades. Those who disagree with them, however, assert that what happened to the Jews was not “inscribed” into the history of previous decades but took place in consequence of a—possibly coincidental—combination of historical factors. In this way, the historical and memory policy debate on the Hungarian Holocaust burgeoned into a debate about the entire Horthy era. At its center lay the question of whether a straight path led from 1919 to 1944; or whether the events of the post-March 1944 period were not direct consequences of the processes underway in the country from 1919 onward and at least after 1938. Does historical research verify the new intentionalists’ continuity theory, according to which the Horthyite Hungarian elite and a large part of Hungarian society had always wanted to get rid of the Jews, and circumstances in 1944 simply presented an opportunity for them to do so? Or does the historical analysis tend to support those who argue that the forces which willingly collaborated during the occupation met stiff and successful resistance of other parts of the political class prior to the occupation—even though they were present in the policies and society of the preceding decades—and were only in a position to influence significantly the sequence of events after the change in circumstances? Is the history of the Horthy regime best written on the basis of the continuity of antisemitic policy—this is the intentionalist position—or should we view the era as seemingly continuous but easily divis-

²⁴ In this volume, 139.

ible into different subperiods, in the course of which, for some time, moderately antisemitic political actors successfully fought against the agents of radical political antisemitism, with the former nevertheless being defeated by the latter in the six years after 1938?

Ignác Romsics has expressed this latter view in debates on the Horthy era and he represents this position in his essay published in this volume. “Despite the virulent antisemitism of the years that followed the Commune [Republic of the Councils in 1919] and the ongoing attempts in cultural life to create scapegoats, there was no straight road from the White Terror of 1919 and the *numerus clausus* legislation of 1920 ... to the Holocaust of 1944, or even, in my view, to the anti-Jewish laws passed after 1938.”²⁵ Romsics argues that there was an ongoing struggle in the Horthy era between advocates of an antisemitic policy and their opponents, whereby some of the latter were “old-fashioned” antisemites who nevertheless opposed radical antisemitism. In Romsics’s view, during the Horthy era, Jewish policy was determined by the balance of power between these two groups at any particular time.²⁶ Antisemitic measures—for instance, the adoption of the *numerus clausus* or the post-1938 anti-Jewish laws—tended to be taken when the former group was in the ascendancy, while antisemitism was put on hold or reversed when the latter group prevailed—for instance, at the time of the Bethlen consolidation (1921–1931) or under the Kállay government (March 1942 to March 1944). Although antisemitic tendencies were a factor in politics throughout the period, they only became preponderant in consequence of a combination of various adverse conditions—the economic crisis, the Nazis’ coming to power in Germany, and the loss of ground of the Western liberal democracies. For this reason, one cannot claim continuity of antisemitism as a basic feature of, and organizing principle for, events in the era.

A different interpretation is given by Mária M. Kovács in her book on the history of the *numerus clausus* legislation.²⁷ Kovács argues that the *numerus clausus* law was purely ideologically motivated; it was not a rational response to Hungary’s political, economic, and social problems, which were nevertheless cited as reasons for the legislation by its advocates

²⁵ In this volume, 32.

²⁶ See also Ignác Romsics, “Trianon és a Holokauszt” [Trianon and the Holocaust], *Rubicon* 9/10 (2012).

²⁷ Mária M. Kovács, *Törvénytől sújtva. A numerus clausus Magyarországon, 1920–1945* [Betrayed by law: The *numerus clausus* in Hungary, 1920–1945] (Budapest: Napvilág, 2013).

and—subsequently—by other apologists. This was because the “problems”—among them the “overproduction” of intellectuals—simply did not exist. Indeed, from the perspective of mainstream society, the adoption of the law was irrational, for it brought the Hungarian state—which faced severe economic difficulties and needed external assistance—into several foreign policy conflicts, which the government had to address repeatedly until 1928.

Why, in spite of all this, was the legislation adopted? The answer to this question expresses unambiguously the intentionalist position supported by Mária M. Kovács throughout the debate on the nature of the Horthy era. In the view of Kovács the Hungarian parliament adopted the antisemitic law (1920) that became known as the *numerus clausus* because those who drafted, voted for, and introduced it were antisemites. They were driven not by political rationality but by antisemitism and antisemitic ideology. It was through the antisemitic prism that they saw and interpreted the world around them. Moreover, their political goals were derived from antisemitism. The *numerus clausus* was a purely anti-Jewish law, “‘a hate law conceived in a fit of rage.’... [H]atred brought it into being, and its aim was to set as norm and perpetuate the anti-Jewish sentiment that had been inflamed in the country during the war, the revolutions, and the ensuing pogroms.”²⁸

Although Mária M. Kovács does not support the theory of a “straight road” from the *numerus clausus* law to the Holocaust and she does not claim that it would have been impossible after 1919 to deviate from the historical path leading to the Hungarian Holocaust, she nevertheless believes that Hungary’s politicians would only have abandoned the antisemitic policy under strong foreign policy pressure and in spite of their own convictions. According to Kovács, the decisive question is the following: „Was there ever in the history of the Horthy regime, any serious attempt by any of its governments, to reconsider the idea of the 1920 Jewish quota, to try to put an end to the discrimination that this legislation had established, or to break away from the overall mentality of a state-imposed antisemitic quota on which this legislation was founded?”²⁹ The *numerus clausus* law, she argues, was the first piece of legislation to convey to Hungarian society that legal means could be used to deny certain groups their rights and, by extension, to confiscate their prop-

²⁸ Ibid., 43.

²⁹ In this volume, 39.

erty. Consequently, „the first step in the violation of equality before the law was taken not in 1938, but in 1920, with the adoption of the university Jewish quota. Once introduced, no government ... had ever made a genuine and consistent effort to restore the full equality of Jews within Hungarian society.”³⁰ Discrimination and antisemitic prejudice were also typical of American society at the time, but in the United States such phenomena did not transmute into antisemitic policies because members of the political elite were not prepared—whatever their own prejudices—to abandon the principle of legal equality. Such inhibitions were not shared even by the more moderate voices in the Hungarian political elite. While Ignác Romsics argues that István Bethlen sought, during the consolidation years, a return to the prewar national-liberal state model and liberal political principles³¹, Kovács believes that in curbing radical antisemitic policies (e.g., at the time of the 1928 revision of the *numerus clausus*) Bethlen, like other “moderate” politicians in subsequent years, was driven primarily by pragmatic considerations: „However, as far as its long-term impact on state antisemitism within Hungary is concerned, not much was done. Unlike Roosevelt’s attempts to curb the tide of racism in the United States, the Bethlen reform did not result in any decisive turn, not the least because the people behind the reform had no genuine intention to bring about such a turn.”³²

Thus, in Mária M. Kovács’s view, the antisemitic policies of the Horthy era cannot be explained by impersonal structural factors. Rather, the decisive factor was hatred of the Jews, often overriding any rational sense. Theoretically, it might have been possible to give non-antisemitic responses to the political and economic crisis that arose in the aftermath of World War I, but Hungary’s antisemitic politicians were not seeking such answers. According to the intentionalist argument, the post-World War I collapse impacted upon a largely antisemitic society, and most of the political leaders who came to power at the time were antisemites. Political debates and disputes were undertaken in the language of antisemitism, culminating in anti-Jewish policies. The adoption of successive anti-Jewish laws reflected the Hungarian political elite’s approach to the economic and

³⁰ In this volume, 43.

³¹ Ignác Romsics, “A Horthy-rendszer mérlege. Diszkrimináció, szociálpolitika és antiszemitizmus Magyarországon 1919–1944” [A balance sheet of the Horthy regime: Discrimination, social policy and antisemitism in Hungary from 1919–1944], *Történelmi Szemle* 55.1 (2013): 156.

³² In this volume, 42.

social problems of the postwar era. Their way of thinking determined how problems were identified and the kinds of solutions sought. All the major political and ecclesiastical figures were agreed on the “urgent need” to “solve the Jewish question” through legislation restricting rights and other coercive measures by the state. The pragmatic arguments made by some politicians in an effort to delay, alter or mitigate antisemitic legislation were weak and ineffective because differences of opinion concerning the precise details of the “solution” were of only secondary importance. What counted was that all participants in the debate were speaking the same language: they had similar views of the “problem to be solved,” even though their appraisals of the political conditions for, and consequences of, the “solution” differed. According to the intentionalists—aside from Mária M. Kovács, Claudia K. Farkas drew similar conclusions in her book³³ as did Gábor Kádár and Zoltán Vági in their earlier monograph³⁴—antisemitic policy was a common feature and essential attribute of each part of the Horthy era. This constitutes the continuity of the era, and so it is misleading—and, indeed, verging on apologetics—to divide these decades into different subperiods.³⁵

³³ Claudia K. Farkas, *Jogok nélkül. A zsidó lét Magyarországon, 1920–1944* [Without rights: Jewish existence in Hungary, 1920–1944] (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2012).

³⁴ Kádár and Vági’s arguments resemble those of Goldhagen. In their view, there were no more than a few hundred non-Jews in the groups capable of influencing policies that did not nurture antisemitic sentiments: “In Hungary, apart from the Jews and several hundred social democratic, liberal and conservative politicians and sensible intellectuals, almost all the other groups capable of influencing public opinion, society and politics were agreed that the situation of the majority in society could only be improved to the detriment of the Jews” (Gábor Kádár and Zoltán Vági, *Hullarablás* [Bodysnatching] [Budapest: Hannah Arendt Egyesület–Jaffa Kiadó, 2005], 12).

³⁵ A separate debate took place on the “division into stages” (or subperiods) of the Horthy era, in which Ignác Romsics and Krisztián Ungváry argued in favor of such a division, while Mária M. Kovács argued against. See Ignác Romsics, “Az utolsó békeév. Mérlegen a Horthy-korszak—A Horthy-korszak két évtizede” [The last year of peace: The Horthy era on the scales—The two decades of the Horthy era], *Rubicon* 1–2 (2012); Krisztián Ungváry, “Az antiszemita (értelmezési keret)” [The antisemitic (interpretative framework)], *Rubiconline*, http://www.rubicon.hu/magyar/oldalak/ungvary_krisztian_az_antiszemita_ertelmezesi_keret/; Mária M. Kovács, “Szakaszolás a történelemben. Hozzászólás a Gerő-Romsics vitához” [The division into phases: A contribution to the Gerő-Romsics debate], *Galamus*, July 12, 2012. <http://www.galamuscsoport.hu/>.

Based on the arguments in his book on the Horthy regime, it would seem Krisztián Ungváry shares this view, albeit grounded in a different logic.³⁶ In terms of his approach, Ungváry has clearly been influenced to the greatest degree by the German historian Götz Aly's work *Hitlers Volksstaat*. According to one critic, in this work Aly "turns on its head" Goldhagen's reasoning.³⁷ That is to say, Aly does not dispute that anti-semitism among the German elite and in German society contributed greatly to the Nazis' Jewish policies culminating in the Holocaust, but in his view such antisemitism was not the root cause of such policies. Rather, the function of antisemitism was to identify the target group whose plundering and annihilation would facilitate to the greatest degree the realization of National Socialist social policy goals. Spoerer's claim can also be applied to the relationship between Ungváry and the Hungarian intentionalists. Ungváry—like Aly—interprets the antisemitic policy of the Horthy regime as an attempt to resolve systemic socioeconomic problems—modernization deficits, threats to the economic and social status of the Christian middle class, serious social inequalities, and conflicts spurred by extreme poverty. In line with the spirit of the times, the regime sought to mitigate the conflicts that threatened social integration by state intervention in the economic and social sphere. Hungarian political leaders were not, however, willing or able to introduce the radical reforms—e.g., land reform—which might have diminished social tensions at the expense of the dominant elite groups. Accordingly, proceeding in the direction of least resistance and utilizing the antisemitic prejudice present in Hungarian society (which they also harbored), Hungary's leaders strove to realize a social policy that would prevent a further loss of status for the Christian middle class and might mitigate the "social question." They calculated that 20–25 percent of Hungary's national wealth could be redistributed by discriminating against 5 percent of the population.³⁸ This endeavor—to which the principle of legal equality was subordinated throughout the period—became a fundamental feature of regime policy. In this way, Ungváry lends his support to the continuity theory.

³⁶ Krisztián Ungváry, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege* [A balance sheet of the Horthy regime] (Pécs-Budapest: Jelenkor–OSZK, 2012).

³⁷ Götz Aly, *Hitlers Volksstaat. Raub, Rassenkrieg und nationaler Sozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: S Fischer, 2005); Mark Spoerer, Review of Götz Aly, *Hitlers Volksstaat. Raub, Rassenkrieg und nationaler Sozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 2005), in *H-Soz-Kult*, May 26, 2005, <http://www.hsozkult.de/publicationreview/id/rezbuecher-6430>.

³⁸ Ungváry, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege*, 58.

He argues that continuity existed both at the level of profound structural tensions within society and in such fields as legislation,³⁹ everyday politics—"bureaucratic antisemitism"—and ideology.⁴⁰ Even so, the policy of antisemitism was not effected to the same degree throughout the period; its intensity depended on the extent to which a small group of key position holders at the very top of the conservative political elite—a group to which, in addition to Bethlen and Kállay, Horthy also belonged intermittently—were able to realize their practical and pragmatic but sometimes even humanistic considerations in the face of constant pressure from below for a radicalization of anti-Jewish policy.⁴¹

Thus, in Ungváry's view, a policy of antisemitism was a feature throughout the era, but—and this is where his position differs from the purely intentionalist argument—antisemitism was not an end in itself. Whereas Mária M. Kovács argues that the problems which antisemitic politicians wished to resolve through anti-Jewish measures did not even exist, according to Ungváry the politicians were reacting to real social problems and conflicts but doing so in an antisemitic fashion. Their aim was to mitigate the modernization conflicts and the resulting social tensions by employing measures that were perceived to be rational and in full accord with the antiliberal and étatist political paradigms of the era: the plundering of the Jews and the redistribution of their wealth and property.

³⁹ "In view of the legislative proposals made and partly submitted between 1920 and 1938, as well as the justification for the Jewish laws citing 'social balance,' it may be concluded that all of these were the products of the same antisemitic policy" (Ungváry, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege*, 115).

⁴⁰ As Zsombor Bódy, a critic of Ungváry's book, pointed out in a debate with the author: although Ungváry's arguments concerning the dynamics of the regime appear to support the continuity theory, in other places in the book he argues against this. See Zsombor Bódy, "Viszontválasz Ungváry Krisztiánnak" [A response to Krisztián Ungváry], *Korall* 54 (2014): 177–78. In the train of thought arguing against the continuity theory, Ungváry is actually repeating the—cited above—arguments of the intentionalists against "deterministic" and therefore apologetic nature of functionalism that serve to acquit the antisemites.

⁴¹ In his written response to Zsombor Bódy—which differs slightly from the main train of thought in the book—Ungváry writes the following about the period from 1920 to 1938: "There were numerous possibilities for the regime, and it was up to the politicians which path they took." In other words, he considers the ascendancy of radical antisemitic politics in the late 1930s to have been a consequence of political struggles with unpredictable outcomes rather than the result of structural imperatives. See Krisztián Ungváry, "Zárás helyett" [Instead of closing], *Korall* 14.54 (2014): 183.

In this train of thought, the intentionalist aspect does not manifest itself in an emphasis on the irrational and self-serving nature of anti-Jewish policy. Rather it is present in the argument that for much of the Horthy regime elite, antisemitism (an antisemitic worldview) served as an interpretative framework for real and serious social problems and political conflicts, whereby it was also to be found among the motives for the elite's political decisions throughout the period.

A common element in all versions of the intentionalist argument is the view that in the aftermath of World War I large parts of the elite and of society were strongly antisemitic and that under the historical circumstances this fact in itself influenced significantly the course of events. Evidently, however, these antisemites did not appear from nowhere. Rather, in order to have a decisive say at the time of the post-WWI crisis, it would seem they must have held certain political positions prior to this period. What were those positions and how did the participants in the antisemitic reversal of 1919 obtain them? How and why did antisemitism in Hungary evolve, becoming an independent explanatory factor of historical events?

These questions were already raised earlier on by Miklós Szabó, the half-forgotten lone wolf of Hungarian historiography. And to these questions Szabó also sought answers. In his unfinished main work—published posthumously—he dated the organizational and ideological continuity of political antisemitism to the final decades of the nineteenth century.⁴² Meanwhile Péter Bihari, in his work on World War I,⁴³ dated the mass appearance of overt antisemitism in Hungary to 1916, the year in which a similar turning point was reached in German history. Kádár and Vági—summarizing the analyses of the other authors mentioned here—share the view that antisemitic ideology had established itself by the 1910s, gaining acceptance among broad sections of Hungarian society.⁴⁴ In a recent article, they put forward the continuity theory in connection with another topic—which was also a major constituent element of the intentionalist position in the German debates. In their view, in the final third of the nineteenth century simultaneously with the appearance in Hungary

⁴² Miklós Szabó, *Az újkonzervativizmus és a jobboldali radikalizmus története (1867–1918)* [The history of new conservatism and right-wing radicalism (1867–1918)] (Budapest: Új Mandátum, 2003).

⁴³ Péter Bihari, *Lövészárkok a hátszágban* [Trenches in the hinterland] (Budapest: Napvilág Könyvkiadó, 2008), 201ff.

⁴⁴ Kádár and Vági, *A végső döntés*, 103–4.

of political antisemitism anti-Jewish pogroms occurred in rapid succession and such pogroms created and helped to sustain a tradition of antisemitic violence.⁴⁵ Victor Karady in his article in the present volume points at the structural factors which played a growing role in influencing Jewish and non-Jewish interactions after the 1890th and made up the observed continuity between the pre-World-War I and post-war times.

Evidently, historians in Hungary—similarly to their colleagues in Germany a good three decades ago—should continue to debate the continuity theory on the basis of new research.⁴⁶ The intentionalist perspective can, in a theoretical sense too, set a new direction for historical research on antisemitism. If someone wades through the debate on the notion and history of fascism in the last decades,⁴⁷ s/he will see that antisemitism and the politics of antisemitism appear as marginal questions and as accompanying and coincidental phenomena to historical fascism. Researchers on fascism are agreed that fascism is just one of several possible responses to the crisis of classical liberalism, and political antisemitism played a salient role in it only in a number of cases. It seems that the historical dynamic of antisemitism varies from country to country, and the dynamic is not tied to the historical processes leading to the appearance of proto-fascist, fascist or fascistoid movements, parties, and systems. Thus, modern political antisemitism is not a “dependent variable”—it is not simply religious/racial prejudice mobilized at times of crisis for political ends, which then returns to its place among the typical patterns of everyday prejudices once

⁴⁵ Kádár and Vági, “Hosszú évszázad: antiszemita erőszak Magyarországon, 1848–1956” [The Long Century: Anti-Semitic Violence in Hungary, 1848–1956], in *A holokauszt Magyarországon – hetven év múltán* [The Holocaust in Hungary: seventy years later], edited by R. L. Braham and A. Kovács (Budapest: Múlt és Jövő Kiadó, 2015), 76–110.

⁴⁶ Some basic works on this topic: Werner Jochmann, *Gesellschaftskrise und Judenfeindschaft in Deutschland 1870–1945* (Hamburg: Christians, 1988); Richard S. Lévy, *The Downfall of the Anti-Semitic Political Parties in Imperial Germany* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975); Shulamit Volkov, *Antisemitismus als kultureller Code. Zehn Essays* (Munich: Beck, 2000); Shulamit Volkov, *Germans, Jews and Antisemites: Trials in Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁴⁷ See, for instance, Roger Griffin, Werner Loh, and Andreas Umland, eds., *Fascism Past and Present, West and East: An International Debate on Concepts and Cases in Comparative Study of the Extreme Right* (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2006); Hermann Graml, Angelika Königseder, and Juliane Wetzels, eds., *Vorurteil und Rassenhass. Antisemitismus in den faschistischen Bewegungen Europas* (Berlin: Metropol, 2001).

the crisis is over, thereby losing its political context. Rather modern political antisemitism is a political factor with its own dynamic in the modern history of certain countries and is capable of existing in different eras and political systems. As such, it can directly shape historical processes in critical historical situations. As to where, when, and how antisemitism becomes an integral part of mainstream politics requires further research. The intentionalist approach will help ensure that this characteristic and role of certain European forms of antisemitism will be at the focus of historical inquiries.

In Germany, the settling of the quarrel between the functionalists and intentionalists and the gradual convergence of their positions have been accompanied by major shifts in the conflicts surrounding historical memory. Until the mid-2000s, such conflicts were induced by the debates on German responsibility and the need to face up to responsibilities. These conflicts lay behind not only the functionalism–intentionalism debate but also the debate on Germany’s “special path” (*Sonderweg*) and the famous “debate of historians” (*Historikerstreit*). Today, it seems the debate on German responsibility has reached a resting place, influenced to a great degree by the fact that research on Nazi antisemitism and the Holocaust addresses the structural and ideological factors influencing historical processes (as well as the relative importance of such factors) in a more balanced fashion and with far less emotion than before.

The Hungarian debate, however, seems to be moving in the opposite direction. The direction and intensity of the debate is greatly influenced by the present disputes on the extent of Hungarian responsibility for the Holocaust. The political context of the debate between the new intentionalists and other historians critical of intentionalist arguments is the conflict between supporters and critics of government memory policy, which seeks to obfuscate Hungarian responsibility and divert the discourse into an interpretative field that differs from that of a strictly academic debate. In this interpretative field, the various positions are manifested as the positions of opposing memory policy camps. Often even historians are unable to resist the temptation of formulating—directly or indirectly—memory policy positions in their works. Of course, it would be an illusion to believe that historiography can exist free of political context, reaching ethereal heights of objectivity—especially where the history of the recent past is the subject of reflection. According to Pierre Nora, the most difficult question for historians of the recent past is the following: “[W]here is the boundary between taking into account those who have memories—witnesses, victims of history—and reconstituting that history solely from the point of view of

such witnesses and victims.”⁴⁸ The tension between history and memory stems from the fact that in written history the remembering self often does not recognize what s/he has experienced, while the historian sometimes fails to resist the pressure, falling victim to what Timothy Snyder has called “commemorative causality.” In the case of the Holocaust, a possible consequence of this is “that which is most effectively and frequently commemorated becomes that which it is most convenient to present as causal in synthetic histories,” whereby “commemorative causality reduces the history of the Holocaust ... to a reflection of contemporary emotions.”⁴⁹ There doubtless exist historical periods when conditions are favorable for the development of sufficient distance and a productive relationship between the remembering self and the historian. The current situation in Hungary is certainly not in this category. Even so—and perhaps this is particularly relevant today—the task of the historian, as Pierre Nora writes, is to “search for a truth which is everyone’s, because it belongs to no one,” that is, to pursue a goal that one can never attain but must always strive for.

⁴⁸ See Pierre Nora, “Recent History and the New Dangers of Politicization,” *Eurozine*, November 24, 2011, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2011-11-24-nora-en.html>.

⁴⁹ Timothy Snyder, “Commemorative Causality,” *Eurozine*, June 6, 2013, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2013-06-06-snyder-en.html>.

II.
THE PATH TO THE
HOLOCAUST

The Antisemitism of István Bethlen and Jewish Policy in the Horthy Era

Ignác Romsics

From the Hungarian Reform Era onward, fears and reservations about Jewish immigration, emancipation, and social integration had been voiced primarily by Hungary's German-speaking urban burghers but also by a number of conservative aristocrats and nobles who wanted to slow down the pace of reform. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such fears and reservations were reformulated within three ideological and political streams: political Catholicism, the agrarian advocacy movement of the medium and large landowners, and the "independence nationalism" of Albert Apponyi and Gábor Ugron. All three streams rejected the liberal tradition, criticized Hungary's post-1867 bourgeois transformation, and—connectedly—voiced emphatic support for traditional values. In the early 1970s, based on Georg Lukács's critique of irrationalism and employing German historiographical terminology, Miklós Szabó collated the three streams of thought under the umbrella term "new conservatism."¹

Two of the three streams—"independence nationalism" and agrarian advocacy ("agrarianism")—influenced the political thinking of the young István Bethlen, who became involved in public life in Maros-Torda County at the end of the nineteenth century and in national politics upon his election to the Hungarian legislature in 1901. As the owner of more than 2,800

¹ Miklós Szabó, "Új vonások a századforduló magyar konzervatív politikai gondolkodásában" [New aspects in Hungarian conservative political thinking at the turn of the century], in *Politikai kultúra Magyarországon 1896–1986* [Political culture in Hungary, 1896–1986], ed. Miklós Szabó (Budapest: Atlantis Program, 1989), 109–76.

hectares of land on the Transylvanian Plain (Mezőség), Bethlen was well acquainted both with the conditions that had given rise—beginning in the 1880s—to the credit union movement and with the social problems identified by the Hungarian Farmers' Union, founded in 1896. With a view to cutting out the commercial middlemen, Bethlen supported the establishment of production and retail cooperatives and the construction of granaries. In 1902 he became the deputy chairman of the Hungarian Farmers' Market Hall Cooperative, which established and then operated the Great Market Hall in Budapest. And in 1907, he succeeded Sándor Károlyi as chairman of the Hungarian Farmers' Retail Cooperative.²

In his election speech of 1901, Bethlen laid out for the first time his views on the need for the state to take social protectionist measures for the benefit of the country's historical elite, which he identified as the middle and large landowners as follows: "Let us esteem and rescue the valuable and patriotic substance present in the small and medium landowners. For they have shown their worth to the nation in the course of a thousand years, not only in the economy but also in other areas; and we know of nothing that will fill their place.... [L]et us defend the country from those who deafen their ears to the complaints of the farmers and who say that any struggle is in vain, as the weak elements must fail and other elements fill their place. And these will be more viable and smarter, and then everything will be fine."³

In 1906 Bethlen spoke in a similar vein at a memorial service for Sándor Károlyi, who died in April of that year. He condemned the "falling into foreign hands" of commerce and industry, the "disloyal competitive spirit," and the principle of "unbridled economic freedom." He contrasted all of these with the principle of state support for agriculture and of farmers' self-advocacy, in other words, with the principle of cooperativism.⁴ In 1911, during a parliamentary debate with Pál Sándor, chairman of the National Hungarian Commercial Union (Országos Magyar Kereskedelmi Egyesülés), Bethlen expanded his agrarian advocacy policy to include a general critique of modernity: "In my view, a toxin has entered our society, seeking to exert an effect in all areas. Not only in politics, but also in the social sphere, in art, in literature, in morality, indeed, in everything that forms a part of

² Ignác Romsics, *Bethlen István. Politikai életrajz* [István Bethlen: A political biography] (Budapest: Magyarágkutató Intézet, 1991), 23–33.

³ From an article in *Székely Lapok*, September 15, 1901, 2–3.

⁴ István Bethlen, *Emlékbeszéd gr. Károlyi Sándor felett* [Speech in memoriam of Count Sándor Károlyi] (Marosvásárhely, 1906).

public life, and I believe that this predilection is far from the national idea. It seeks the realization of an international spirit in this country, and I see that sometimes it falls under the name of radicalism or under the name of internationalism, while occasionally it is modestly satisfied with attacking the large Hungarian landowners. In our view it is in the country's interest to remove this toxin from public life. This is our conviction, and to this end we shall fight with all our strength and with the fullness of our conviction."⁵

Although the word "Jew" is absent from speeches made by Bethlen at the time, there can be little doubt that his readers and students identified Hungarian Jews—or at least some parts of Hungarian Jewry—as belonging to the social groups and purveying the political and artistic ideas which Bethlen condemned, and that it was his political intention that they should do so. In other words, the young Bethlen's conservatism—like that of many of his political bedfellows—was alloyed with interest- and value-driven antisemitism. Bethlen himself made this evident when, in 1913, he accepted a senior position at the magazine *A Cél* (The Aim), which had been founded by a radical group of antisemites led by Miklós Szemere. In terms of its stance the magazine anticipated in many respects the subsequent, so-called Christian-national ideas of the post-1919 era.⁶

Hostility toward Jews grew at an unprecedented rate during World War I and especially at the time of the revolutions in 1918–19. A large majority of the parliamentary representatives elected in 1920 by secret ballot and with almost universal suffrage shared the belief, expressed publicly by Albert Apponyi in 1920, that "the advance of the Jews in the nation's economic and cultural life is so disproportionate that Christian society rightly seeks protection against it."⁷ The same view was shared by Bethlen, who declared—in his prime ministerial speech on April 19, 1921—that by the beginning of the twentieth century "commerce, enterprise, and finance had fallen into the hands of people who were not, and possibly are not, welded to the national sentiment in the manner that

⁵ *Képviselőházi Napló*, January 3, 1911, 316. Published in *Bethlen István gróf beszédei és írásai* [The speeches and writings of Count István Bethlen] (Budapest: Genius Könyvkiadó R. T., 1933), vol. 1, 32–46.

⁶ Romsics, *Bethlen István*, 49; and Miklós Szabó, *Az újkonzervativizmus és a jobboldali radikalizmus története (1867–1918)* [The history of new conservatism and right-wing radicalism (1867–1918)] (Budapest: Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, 2003), 297–307.

⁷ "Apponyi jászberényi beszéde" [Apponyi's speech in Jászberény], *Virradat*, June 8, 1920.

would be correct and desirable.” In other words, “the Hungarian middle class had lost its leading role in the economic field.” The task was “to win back this leading role for the middle class.”

In two regards, Bethlen added nuance to his social policy goals. In contrast with the various right-wing radical groups, which demanded the expulsion of the Jews (coupled with the confiscation of their wealth) and the revoking of civil equality, Bethlen underlined that he would oppose any form of “rowdy antisemitism” and that “legal equality [was] the basis and guarantee of national life and should not be curtailed.” Even so, he made a distinction between “Hungarians of Jewish faith” who accepted the social status quo and the politically radical “Jews,” who had upset the social status quo in 1918–19 and who—according to Bethlen—had consequently “declared themselves to be a separate race or people.”⁸ Historians have called this position or stance, which was shared by Horthy and by most other conservatives at the time and which classified Jews according to their political orientation and the extent of their integration, “selective antisemitism.”

During Bethlen’s ten years as prime minister, state-sanctioned antisemitism took the form of a single piece of legislation: the numerus clausus law of 1920, which had been adopted with the aim of reshaping the balance of power in the economy and in society. As we know, the law sought specifically to alter the ratio of Jews to non-Jews in the professions—to the detriment of Jews and to the benefit of the Christian middle classes. Bethlen was not yet a member of parliament at the time of the law’s adoption, and so he could not vote on it. In my view, however, he and his ministers agreed essentially with the legislative intent of the numerus clausus. Indeed, it seems that the 1928 amendment to the legislation was made solely for pragmatic reasons and only under pressure from the League of Nations and from international Jewish organizations with ties to the world of finance. In a 1926 letter to Bethlen, Klebelsberg acknowledged that the law needed to be revised “not with a view to subjecting the nation once more to thousands of Jewish university students, but in order to save the essence of the law by mitigating its terms in a rational manner.”⁹

⁸ *Bethlen István gróf beszédei és írásai*, 154–57.

⁹ Miklós Szinai and László Szűcs, eds., *Bethlen István titkos iratai* [The secret writings of István Bethlen] (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1972), 256–57. Cf. M. Mária Kovács, *Törvénytől sújtva. A numerus clausus Magyarországon, 1920–1945* [Betrayed by law: The numerus clausus in Hungary, 1920–1945] (Budapest: Napvilág, 2012).

In other areas, however, Bethlen managed to reduce antisemitism and to restore the pre-1918 forms of cooperation with Jewry. Accordingly, he continued the efforts of his predecessor, Pál Teleki, to terminate street fighting and to restore the rule of law. Further, he clearly regarded representatives of Jewry as indispensable partners at all levels. He stated with conviction that it was neither possible nor desirable to exclude the Jews from the country's reconstruction and that "it is impermissible to proceed against honest businesses and banks using police means simply because they are run by Jews." In the course of land reform, Jewish-owned large estates—for example, the estate of the Weiss family in Derekegyház—received the same protection as the aristocratic estates. In response to criticism by the far right, Bethlen stated the following: "The intention of land reform was not to confiscate someone's land just because he is Jewish." He repeatedly requested the editors of government-friendly newspapers to avoid making generalizations if a Jewish agent was found cheating and to refrain from demagogic attacks "on Jewish banks because of rising prices."¹⁰ At the same time, he too believed that "there is a Jewish question in the country." Even so, in his view, the solution was not to abandon equality before the law, but to realize a "constructive policy" aimed at ensuring that "in the economic sphere we can be the same without them as we are with them."¹¹

Guided by the above goals, Bethlen—similarly to István Tisza before him—fostered good relations with the representatives of Jewish capital; he appointed a Jew (Baron Frigyes Korányi) as one of his ministers; and throughout the period middle- and upper-class men of Jewish ancestry were to be found among his liberal grouping within the governing party. In 1926, on the establishment of a second chamber of parliament (the upper house) as a replacement for the old House of Lords, seats were allocated not only to half a dozen representatives of Jewish capital but also to two rabbis—one representing the Orthodox congregation and the other the Neolog congregation.¹²

In his post-WWII book, Jenő Lévai, a returning deportee who became a liberal journalist at *Az Est Lapok*, drew the following balance sheet of Bethlen's policies. Lévai's words are a little nostalgic in tone, perhaps reflecting the horrific events of 1944: "His ten years of premier-

¹⁰ Romsics, *Bethlen István*, 156–57.

¹¹ *Bethlen István gróf beszédei és írásai*, 161.

¹² Levente Püski, *A felsőház története 1927–1945* [The history of the upper house, 1927–1945] (Budapest: Napvilág, 2000), 23–31.

ship managed to put a halt to the antisemitic reaction, which had seemed almost insurmountable.... He gradually eradicated the so-called counter-revolutionary spirit, slowly removing the regent's Szeged clique, thereby creating an opportunity for more peaceful development.... The legal status of the Jews rapidly moved toward full equality before the law. Above all, the Curia's Principle Decision No. 748 stated that 'the Jews in Hungary are neither a social class nor a nationality; rather they are a religious denomination.' This position, announced by the Curia in 1925, made it far more difficult to discuss the Jewish question in a destructive or inciting manner and thus contributed greatly to preserving peace in society." With the amendment to the *numerus clausus*, "the 'legal status' of the Jews became complete. Jewry took its place in service of production with full force. Industry and commerce were thriving; there were no restrictions preventing individual initiative. In the struggle against the Trianon Peace and in securing a peaceful revision, Hungarian Jewry stood alongside the country's Christian citizens. The Bethlen government was seeking to quell with a strong hand the now rather sporadic atrocities and abuses."¹³

In the wake of the economic crisis, Bethlen resigned as head of government in 1931. Even so, the political system tied to his name continued to operate with only minor changes until the final third of the 1930s. The framework established by Bethlen was retained not only by his fellow conservative, Count Gyula Károlyi, but also—albeit reluctantly—by Gyula Gömbös, who was known for his dictatorial tendencies and fervent antisemitism. When the latter took office in October 1932, he felt compelled in his first parliamentary speech as prime minister to state the following: "I have revised my position; I wish now to regard that part of Jewry which acknowledges a community of fate with the nation in a fraternal fashion and in the same manner as my Hungarian brothers."¹⁴

Despite the virulent antisemitism of the years that followed the Commune (Republic of the Councils) and the ongoing attempts in cultural and intellectual life to create scapegoats, there was no straight road from

¹³ Jenő Lévai, *Fekete könyv a magyar zsidóság szenvedéseiről* [Black book on the sufferings of Hungarian Jewry] (Budapest: Officina, 1946), 8–9.

¹⁴ Péter Kiss, *Magyar kormányprogramok 1867–2002 / I 1867–1944* [Hungarian government programs, 1867–2002, vol. 1, 1867–1944] (Budapest: Magyar Hivatalos Közlönykiadó, 2004), 616. Cf. József Vonyó, "Gömbös Gyula jobboldali radikalizmusa" [The right-wing radicalism of Gyula Gömbös], in *A magyar jobboldali hagyomány 1900–1948* [The Hungarian right-wing tradition, 1900–1948], ed. Ignác Romsics (Budapest: Osiris, 2009), 262–74.

the White Terror of 1919 and the numerous *clausus* legislation of 1920 to the Holocaust of 1944, or even, in my view, to the anti-Jewish laws passed after 1938.

The renunciation of Bethlenite conservative-liberal integration policies, which began under Kálmán Darányi's government between 1936 and 1938, was driven by two factors: first, the return of social tensions in the wake of the economic crisis, which led to increased support in society for the previously marginalized far right; second, changes in the international milieu—principally, the loss of ground of the two major liberal democracies in Europe (Great Britain and France) and the rise of Nazi Germany, which pursued a policy of radical antisemitism from the outset.

Evidently, in the 1930s Hungary was not yet subject to direct German pressure to discriminate against the Jews. Even so, several Hungarian political figures—for instance, Darányi and Béla Imrédy—were convinced that Hungary would soon face such an expectation from Germany and that action “in anticipation of Nazi demands was required, whereby waiting was not an option, lest we be forced into adopting even stricter laws subsequently.”¹⁵ In my view, however, the decisive point is not this assumption, which later turned out to be true, but rather the growing demand in Hungarian society for a “change of guard,” that is, for existential improvements at the expense of the Jews.¹⁶ Discrimination by means of the law and under the guise of “creating a balance” maximized at 20 percent the share of people of Jewish faith in business and professional life. In 1938, members of both the lower and upper houses of the Hungarian parliament voted in favor of the discriminatory law, to which even Horthy made no objection. On the other hand, Bethlen, who by this time was a member of the upper house, remained true to his old beliefs; for him it was unacceptable to abandon, on grounds of religion or ancestry, the principle of legal equality and to forcibly remove people of Jewish faith from their jobs. He warned that “rendering legal inequality an institution of the Hungarian constitution is a shortsighted policy, one that the state should not undertake. In my view, what the government is doing amounts to a certificate of poverty for the nation.” What could and needed to be done

¹⁵ John Flournoy Montgomery, *Hungary: The Unwilling Satellite* (Morristown, NJ: Vista Books, 1993) [a reprint of the original 1947 publication], 111.

¹⁶ For more details, see Krisztián Ungváry, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege. Diszkrimináció, szociálpolitika és antiszemitizmus Magyarországon 1919–1944* [A balance sheet of the Horthy regime: Discrimination, social policy and anti-Semitism in Hungary from 1919–1944] (Pécs and Budapest: Jelenkor Kiadó, 2013), 86–363.

was reminiscent of the practice of his own term as prime minister: providing state subsidies to Christian business interests, granting concessions to non-Jewish-owned companies, and steering Christian youths toward careers in the business sector. All of this was to be done without violating the principle of legal equality and without passing discriminatory laws.¹⁷

Barely a year after the adoption of the anti-Jewish legislation of 1938 (the First Jewish Law), Hungary adopted further antisemitic legislation (the Second Jewish Law), whereby the discriminatory provisions were now based on “race” and ancestry rather than religious affiliation. The Jewish quota adopted in 1938, which permitted a 20 percent share of Jewish employees, was decreased to 12 percent in the business sector, to 6 percent in the intellectual professions, and to 0 percent among state employees. The exclusion of the overwhelming majority of Hungarian citizens of Jewish ancestry from Hungarian society ran counter to the very foundations of the state- and nation-building policy of the Dualist Era, a policy which Bethlen had endeavored to restore in the 1920s (with partial success). Consequently, Bethlen and several of his fellow parliamentary representatives protested. They told Horthy that the law “inflicts wounds, but does not provide for their healing” and that it was impossible “to take the bread out of the hands of Jewry without inducing severe risks.” While voicing reservations in several private statements about the “excessive pace and radicalism” of the legislation, Horthy declined to use his veto to stop the legislation. Instead, he signed the government bill, which had already been adopted by both houses of the Hungarian legislature.¹⁸

Regarding the memorandum submitted to Horthy by eleven parliamentarians—among them Tibor Eckhardt, Zoltán Tildy, and Gyula Kornis—one should note that even the signatories expressed concern that the Jews were “too numerous and too powerful.” They themselves suggested, with a view to achieving a long-term solution, the “suppression” of Jewish influence in the Hungarian economy and the “supervised emigration of Jews who lose their livelihoods.” This latter measure (i.e., the partial expulsion of the Jewish population), in conjunction with German and other similar plans, was supported not only by the far right but also—from the late 1930s—by a growing portion of the conservative right. Such plans were mentioned by Teleki in his discussions with Hitler on

¹⁷ Romsics, *Bethlen István*, 272.

¹⁸ Miklós Szinaï and László Szűcs, eds., *Horthy Miklós titkos iratai* [The secret writings of Miklós Horthy], 4th ed. (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1972), 205–10.

November 20, 1940, and on several subsequent occasions by the Hungarian prime minister, Miklós Kállay.¹⁹

Notwithstanding the Kamianets-Podilskyi massacre of Jewish deportees from Hungary and the grave discrimination suffered by Hungarian Jews both before and during the war, the situation of persons deemed Jewish by the authorities was better overall in Hungary than in the adjacent countries. In Slovakia, Romania and Croatia the period saw a series of bloody pogroms that decimated the Jewish population. Moreover in those countries the deportation of Jews to concentration camps began in 1942, while in the German-occupied Polish and Russian territories persons classified as Jews were subjected to ghettoization and systematic massacre from 1939 onward.²⁰ In contrast, in Hungary the lives of the vast majority of Jews were not directly threatened until 1944. Systematic pogroms and atrocities were averted, which, as Nathaniel Katzburg stated, “was indeed exceptional in the part of Europe subject to the Axis powers.”²¹

The policies of the Kállay government, which Bethlen fully supported, at least held out the possibility that individuals in Hungary classified as Jews could survive the war, unlike the Jewish populations in the neighboring countries. However, the German army’s invasion in March 1944 put an end to such hopes. Germany’s leaders in Berlin and the men they dispatched to Budapest made no secret of their expectations vis-à-vis the Hungarian authorities. As SS General Ernst Kaltenbrunner, the man sent by Himmler to Budapest, told the new Hungarian prime minister, Döme Sztójay, in the aftermath of the occupation, “Hungary has primarily to resolve the Jewish question in accordance with the example set by the neighboring countries.”²²

Bethlen spent the subsequent weeks and months in hiding at various places around the country. Two sources provide insights into his views on the Sztójay government’s Jewish policy and on the sufferings of the Jews. The first is a letter he wrote to Miklós Horthy at the very end of June 1944, which may even have contributed to the halting of deportations in

¹⁹ Nathaniel Katzburg, *Zsidópolitika Magyarországon 1919–1943* [Jewish policy in Hungary, 1919–1943] (Budapest: Babel Kiadó, 2002), 103–24 and 196–98.

²⁰ Victor Karady, *Zsidóság Európában a modern korban. Társadalomtörténeti vázlat* [Jewry in Europe in the modern era: A social history sketch] (Budapest: Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, 2000), 396–416, 377–416.

²¹ Katzburg, *Zsidópolitika*, 200.

²² Cited in Lévai, *Fekete könyv*, 96.

early July. The second source is a rather long-winded essay Bethlen composed in July and August: “A magyar politika a második világháborúban” (Hungarian policy in World War II). The essay only came to light in the late 1980s; it was published first in English and then in Hungarian.²³ In his letter to Horthy, Bethlen proposed the immediate dismissal of the Sztójay government and the appointment of a new cabinet tasked with “ending the inhumane, stupid and cruel persecution of the Jews, a policy thoroughly unsuited to the Hungarian character by means of which the present government is tainting Hungary’s image in the eyes of the world.” In Bethlen’s view, Sztójay’s policies had turned the country into “a seedbed for the most vile corruption, robbery and theft, ensnaring a considerable part of the Hungarian intelligentsia. Unfortunately, it is now barely possible to remove this stain on our good reputation, but this barbarity must be halted because otherwise Christian Hungarian society itself will become incurably infected.”²⁴ Meanwhile, in his lengthy essay, Bethlen searched for the causes of the awful turn in events. In his last lines, as a kind of summary of his causal investigation and perhaps thinking of himself, he quoted Goethe’s words: *Halb zog es ihn, halb sank er hin, so war es um ihn geschehen*.²⁵

²³ Ignác Romsics, ed., *Bethlen István emlékirata 1944* [István Bethlen’s memoir, 1944] (Budapest: Zrínyi Katonai Kiadó, 1988), 149.

²⁴ Szinai and Szűcs, *Horthy Miklós titkos iratai*, 457–64.

²⁵ Romsics, *Bethlen István emlékirata 1944*, 149. The exact quote from Goethe is: “Da war’s um ihn geschehn; / Halb zog sie ihn, halb sank er hin / Und ward nicht mehr gesehn.” [His fate became quite plain: / Half drawn by her he glided in / And was not seen again. (Translated by Edwin Zeydel, 1955)]

The Numerus Clausus and the Anti-Jewish Laws

Mária M. Kovács

This chapter is intended to raise a few issues on the connection between the antisemitism of the 1920s and the anti-Jewish legislation in the 1930s and 1940s in Hungary. This connection does get some attention in Hungarian scholarship on the Holocaust, but remarkably enough, we find more discussion on what that connection was not like, than what it was actually like. On one side of the debate, we find those who maintain that we cannot look at the history of the Horthy regime as a history of ever escalating racism. They argue that interwar Hungarian history did not progress on a predetermined straight line from the 6 percent university Jewish quota established in 1920 through the anti-Jewish laws of the late 1930s to the deportations. On the other side of the debate, there are those who see more continuity in the history of the Horthy regime, and regard interwar Hungarian antisemitism as a story of its own: largely a Hungarian story that had unfolded following its own logic up until its fatal encounter during the war, with the genocidal project by German Nazis.

In my view this is a very problematic debate. Historians are neither able to confirm nor refute the existence of any “straight line” that would be confined to Hungarian history and Hungarian history only. Interwar Hungarian history was greatly influenced by external, foreign pressures. In the 1920s, external influences worked to moderate Hungarian antisemitism, whereas in the 1930s, external influences amplified domestic antisemitism. The tectonic transformations on the international scene in Europe call into question whether we can at all discuss the problem of a “straight line” in the history of antisemitism in Hungary between the 1920s and the 1940s.

But that does not mean that we should give up investigating those connections that did, in fact, exist between the antisemitism of the 1920s and that of the 1940s.

I would like to add a further note on the debate about the “straight line” in Hungarian antisemitism. In the 1920s racial and ethnic discrimination existed not only in Hungary, but also in several other states of the Western world. For example, the Southern states of the United States still retained racial segregation laws that were more severe than the university Jewish quota in Hungary, segregating blacks from whites in schools, in many public services and in most of the army.¹

Unlike in Hungary, in the United States no laws were ever enacted against Jews. But antisemitism did exist there, too.² In several regions Jews were subject to job discrimination and some Ivy League and medical schools also introduced Jewish quotas.³ Jews could not buy or rent real estate in certain residential districts in which house owners signed so-called racial covenants that prohibited the sale of property to Jews and blacks, and the courts refused to accept cases against the covenants. According to a Roper poll conducted in 1939, 53% of Americans believed that Jews in the United States enjoy disproportionate advantages and should be restricted in the economy. During the Great Depression, some observers (the sociologist Daniel Bell, for instance) were anxious that any further rise in racial and ethnic tensions might be so dangerous as to even disrupt the political system.

Yet, bad as they were, ethnic and racial tensions in the United States did not escalate to large-scale violence either during the so-called “tribal twenties” or afterward, during the Great Depression, or the war years.⁴ Clearly, in this case, one cannot speak of any kind of “preordained straight line” from ethnic and racial discrimination to subsequent large-scale violence. (I will return to this problem later.)

¹ Robert C. Smith, *Encyclopedia of African American Politics* (New York, NY: Facts On File, 2003), 200.

² John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860–1925* (New York: Atheneum, 1967).

³ In New York City for instance, where—just as in Budapest—a quarter of the population was Jewish, Jews were excluded from 90% of general office work. In some residential districts, Jews, along with blacks, were unable to purchase real estate because of the so-called “racial covenants” that ruled out the sale of such estates to Jews or blacks. There were also cases of boycotts of Jewish stores.

⁴ Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 278.

For now, let me reformulate the question about continuity and discontinuity in interwar antisemitism the following way: Was there ever in the history of the Horthy regime, any serious attempt by any of its governments, to reconsider the idea of the 1920 Jewish quota, to try to put an end to the discrimination that this legislation had established, or to break away from the overall mentality of a state-imposed antisemitic quota on which this legislation was founded?

This is an important question. It is important because eighteen years later, in 1938, the 1920 legislation served as a prototype for the new anti-Jewish law. This is not at all surprising, if we consider that back in 1920, the proponents of the university Jewish quota were fully explicit about their plans to extend the Jewish quota beyond the universities to all income-generating occupations. For them, the university quota was only a first step in a series of future quotas. As the writer Dezső Szabó put it at the time: Hungary needs a complete system of legislation in which “all paragraphs support all other paragraphs. We need to establish a numerus clausus in all income-generating occupations.”⁵ Two important prime ministers in the 1920s and 1930s, Gyula Gömbös and Pál Teleki, fully agreed with this view. A telling example of how strong the conceptual connection between the numerus clausus and the anti-Jewish laws had been is that Regent Miklós Horthy himself, in his memoirs written after the war, used the term “numerus clausus” not only to refer to the university Jewish quota, but also to the anti-Jewish laws of the 1930s.⁶

But the mere fact that the 1920 Jewish quota and the anti-Jewish legislation of the 1930s were based on identical principles does not, in itself, imply that an extension of the 1920 law beyond the universities was inevitable. In the United States, for instance, the trend in the rise of racism during the twenties was, in fact, arrested in the 1930s under Roosevelt’s New Deal. Roosevelt combined the creation of new jobs under the emergency and relief budgets with a considerable effort to reduce job discrimination for blacks and other groups. He established the federal-level Fair Employment Practices Committee, and, later on, he obliged all firms with government contracts to include a nondiscrimination clause. It is a fact that, despite his efforts, Roosevelt did not succeed in substantially raising immigration quotas for Jews during the war. But that should

⁵ Dezső Szabó, “A jogrend felépítése,” *A Nép*, May 26, 1921.

⁶ Miklós Horthy, *Emlékirataim* [Memoirs] (Buenos Aires: Cagnasso, 1953), 217–18.

not overshadow the fact that his domestic policies were more successful: the New Deal brought about a formidable turn in reversing the 1920s trend of rising racism and opening up the way for new reforms to reduce discrimination.⁷

No similar turn ever occurred in the history of the Horthy regime following 1920. But that being said, nor can we maintain that the escalation of antisemitism proceeded in a chronologically “straight line.” In the late 1920s, the government of István Bethlen did, in fact, take one step to mitigate explicit, state-level antisemitic discrimination: in 1928 the anti-Jewish wording of the university quota was formally removed from the legislation.

But Bethlen’s 1928 reform did not eliminate the mechanisms of discrimination that barred most Jewish applicants from higher education. What the reform did do, was to bring a small, symbolic improvement both in wording and in the number of admitted Jewish students.⁸ This small, symbolic improvement was then maintained for five years, until 1933, and it would have probably continued further, if not for Hitler’s rise to power in Germany.

Nonetheless, the 1928 reform was deeply problematic from the moment of its inception. Prime Minister Bethlen left no doubt as to what his major motivation had been to push through the reform: namely to satisfy external, Western critiques, primarily in the League of Nations, who found the Jewish quota to be in violation of international law. The emphasis that Bethlen put on external pressure as his major concern at once indicated what was missing from the reform. It was precisely the power of conviction that the Jewish quota had been inherently wrong. In

⁷ The so-called New Deal Coalition, which included small wage earners in big cities, blacks, trade union members, religious minorities, recent immigrants and the traditional Democratic voters of the South secured Roosevelt’s electoral basis for several terms. In 1933, 82% of all Jews voted for Roosevelt and by 1940 this grew to 90%.

⁸ Mária M. Kovács, *Törvénytől sújtva, A numerus clausus Magyarországon, 1920–1945* [Betrayed by law: The numerus clausus in Hungary, 1920–1945] (Budapest: Napvilág, 2012), 57. The proportion of Jewish students grew from 8.8% in 1928/1929 to 9.6% in 1930, 10% in 1931, 11.9% in 1932 and 12% in 1933, after which time their proportion began to decline again. All of this, however, did not imply that Jewish applicants were treated at admissions equally with their non-Jewish counterparts: between 1928 and 1933 around 70% of Jewish applicants were refused admission, while the refusal rate among non-Jewish applicants was around 15%.

other words what was missing was exactly the kind of commitment that drove the Roosevelt government to take decisively important steps to reverse the rise of racism and ethnicism within the United States. As Roosevelt formulated it: "The democratic way of life within the nation can be defended successfully only with the help and support of all groups within its borders ... regardless of race, creed, color or national origin."⁹

Bethlen's reform in 1928 was not inspired by similar beliefs. His reform was designed to satisfy foreign demands, but without an intention to genuinely eliminate discrimination. In a confidential letter to Bethlen, Count Klebelsberg, his minister of culture, summarized the philosophy of the reform—namely, that it should only be about external appearances, rather than a genuine internal change. He wrote: "Our aim with the reform should be to come up with a new text that will put an end to 'interference by the Hague or Geneva.'... But at the same time we must not allow our nation to be flooded again by thousands of Jewish students."¹⁰

Prime Minister Bethlen himself presented the reform in a similar way. He described it as a concession to foreign demands, but a concession that does not follow from his own views and commitments. In explaining the reform, he told the press that he was not "playing a deceptive game. In practice, the hopes that some liberal circles attach to the reform will be disappointed. For now, Hungarian Jews should be satisfied that those aspects of the law that they consider a yellow stain will be eliminated by the government and they should leave the rest to be sorted out in the future."¹¹

Bethlen's language in fact echoed his own personal beliefs, namely that despite the reform, he still approved of the Jewish quota. His views on the Jewish quota were rather similar to those of the radical antisemites: he spoke of the Jewish quota as a manifestation of "the life instinct" by the Christian middle classes in their "struggle for survival." Bethlen never

⁹ Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Executive Order 8802: Reaffirming Policy of Full Participation in the Defense Program by All Persons, Regardless of Race, Creed, Color, or National Origin, and Directing Certain Action in Furtherance of Said Policy," June 25, 1941, <http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/history/35th/thelaw/eo-8802.html>.

¹⁰ Miklós Szinai and László Szűcs, eds., *Bethlen István titkos iratai* [The secret papers of István Bethlen] (Budapest: Kossuth, 1972), 256–57.

¹¹ Mária M. Kovács, *Törvénytől sújtva*, 196.

really abandoned his view that Jews in Hungary should be restricted, not even during the reform of 1928.¹²

Thus, the 1928 reform of the *numerus clausus* was not much more than a phony paper reform. On paper, the Jewish quota was eliminated from state-level legislation, but in reality, discrimination continued via lower-level government decrees. During the admission cycle, universities were obliged to cable to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs how many Jewish students they admitted and the telegrams were immediately forwarded to Geneva to the office of the Hungarian delegate to the League of Nations.

At the end, the balance sheet of the Bethlen reform was rather gloomy. On one side, it was a diplomatic success insofar as from 1928 the League of Nations stopped calling on Hungary to account for its anti-semitic discrimination. However, as far as its long-term impact on state antisemitism within Hungary is concerned, not much was done. Unlike Roosevelt's attempts to curb the tide of racism in the United States, the Bethlen reform did not result in any decisive turn, not the least because the people behind the reform had no genuine intention to bring about such a turn. Therefore, as soon as the League of Nations system was sidestepped by Hitler's Germany, the major motivating force behind the Bethlen reform also disappeared. With the external, foreign constraints vanishing, the reintroduction of an explicit Jewish quota and its extension to income-generating occupations was only a matter of time.

I would like to conclude with an extremely sad quote from Prime Minister Bethlen himself. In the summer of 1944, as Hungary's Jews were being put in ghettos and on trains, Bethlen was already in hiding. From there he sent Regent Horthy a memorandum, requesting Horthy to dismiss the Sztójay government and put an end to deportations. In the memorandum, Bethlen gave a brief overview of the process that led Hungary to become complicit in Nazi policies. The point of no return, as Bethlen put it, was the adoption of the anti-Jewish legislation of 1938. As he explained, the Darányi government that prepared this legisla-

¹² Nor did he abandon this view later on, during the late 1930s. In 1937—already in opposition—Bethlen spoke up in parliament against the plan of the so-called “first,” comprehensive anti-Jewish law that introduced a 20% Jewish quota in all free professions, in the press, and among all office employees. But even as he rejected the plan of the comprehensive Jewish quota for its radicalism, he found it necessary to *add* that in *the long run* “Hungary *must* do something about the Jewish question” which needs to be confronted openly and sincerely, and which needs to be “treated” with appropriate means.

tion expected that this legislation would be the final word in anti-Jewish measures, and would actually put an end to all further demands for more severe policies. But—as Bethlen wrote—“this hope was naturally unfounded. The fact that [the legislation] had violated the principle of equality before the law was an invitation for a legion of further demands to resolve the Jewish question. Our nation is running to its own destruction because there is no one to caution the nation and to hold it back from the abyss to which it is racing in a mindless furor.”¹³ The quote illustrates that by this time, that is, by the summer of 1944, Bethlen fully realized that the decisive step in the escalation of antisemitism was the violation of equality before the law. Yet even in spite of this belated realization, he failed to confront the fact that the first step in the violation of equality before the law was taken not in 1938, but in 1920, with the adoption of the university Jewish quota. Once introduced, no government, including his own, had ever made a genuine and consistent effort to restore the full equality of Jews within Hungarian society in order to eliminate, what Bethlen himself termed, “an invitation for a legion of further demands to resolve the Jewish question.”

¹³ István Bartyik, ed., *Bethlen István emlékirata, 1944* [A memoir by István Bethlen, 1944] (Budapest: Zrínyi Katonai Kiadó, 1988), 131 and 123, respectively.

Continuities of the “Jewish Question” in Hungary since the “Golden Age”

Victor Karady

In recent studies of the historical and political developments in the interwar years there is an open (even if only virtual) debate about the possible link between developments in the liberal Dual Monarchy, the White Terror in 1919–1920 together with the ensuing implicitly but strongly anti-Jewish *numerus clausus* law (1920) and the openly and over the years more and more Nazi-type anti-Jewish legislation of the years 1938–1944, concluded finally by the Hungarian holocaust after the invasion of Hungary—its “most faithful Ally”—by the *Wehrmacht* on March 19, 1944. Some major specialists of the period would recognize no continuity (such as Ignác Romsics¹) or a limited or ambiguous continuity only (Krisztián Ungváry²) between the early anti-Jewish turbulences of the “Christian Course” and the successive pieces of anti-Jewish legislation, let alone the Shoah. Others (like Mária M.

¹ “In spite of the sharp antisemitic witch hunting of the years after the Soviet Republic, which prevailed permanently in public life, there was no direct road from the 1919 White Terror and the 1920 *numerus clausus* to the Holocaust, not even to the anti-Jewish laws from 1938 onward” Ignác Romsics, in *A Magyar zsidóság története* [History of Hungarian Jewry], középiskolai tankönyv kézírata (2015). 76 (my translation).

² Krisztián Ungváry, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege, Diskrimináció, szociálpolitika és antiszemitizmus Magyarországon 1919–1944* [The balance sheet of the Horthy regime: Discrimination, social policy and antisemitism in Hungary, 1919–1944] (Pécs/Budapest: Jelenkor/Oszk, 2013), 608.

Kovács³), on the contrary, draw a direct line between the two, regarding the infamous *numerus clausus* as the first anti-Jewish law proper in Hungarian (and, for that matter, European) history, a precedent to what followed in 1938 and later. Earlier investigations, notably by the late Miklós Szabó, would even stress the beginning of the parting of ways between Jews and the Christian majority in the urban middle classes and elite clusters already in the early years of the twentieth century.⁴ Randolph Braham in his classic synthesis did not specifically broach the problem but implicitly suggests the same even by the titles of his initial chapters: “Prelude to Destruction”⁵, and “From Consolidation to Proto-Fascism.”⁶ Attila Pók adopted a more reserved opinion, stating that “It is the intellectual duty of the historian... to warn: between various forms of antisemitism, its institutionalization... and the Holocaust there is no bridge with many pillars, only provisionally laid planks.”⁷

I will argue in this exposé in favor of the thesis of direct continuity on the basis of observations of both social and political history, without denying the legitimacy of the opposite theoretical option. The debate is less about facts, even if I hope to align here a number of hitherto unemployed, unassembled or underresearched indicators, but essentially about interpretations. In order to contextualize in historical time the whole debate, one has to go back to the liberal Dual Monarchy established in

³ Mária M. Kovács, “The Hungarian Numerus Clausus: Ideology, Apology and History, 1919–1945,” in *The Numerus Clausus in Hungary: Studies on the First Anti-Jewish Law and Academic Anti-Semitism in Modern Central Europe*, ed. Victor Karady and Péter Tibor Nagy (Budapest: Pasts Inc., 2012), 45. See her study: “The Problem of Continuity between the 1921 Numerus Clausus and the Post-1938 Anti-Jewish Legislation in Hungary,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 35.1 (2005), 23–32. See also Karl-Heinz Schlarp, “Das ungarische Numerus-Clausus-Gesetz von 1920 als erste judenfeindliche Gesetzgebung in Europa, Ursachen und Folgen,” in *Südosteuropa. Festschrift für Edgar Hösch*, ed. Konrad Clewing and Oliver Jens Schmitt (München: R. Oldenbourg, 2005), 349–82.

⁴ Miklós Szabó, “Középosztály és újkonzervativizmus. Harc a politikai katolicizmus és a polgári radikalizmus között” (1974), in *Politikai kultúra Magyarországon 1896–1986* [Political culture in Hungary, 1896–1986] (Budapest: Medvetánc-könyvek, 1989), 177–90.

⁵ Randolph L. Braham and Bela Vago, eds., *The Holocaust in Hungary: Forty Years Later* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 1.

⁶ Ibid. 40.

⁷ Attila Pók, *A haladás hitele. Progresszió, bűnbakok, összeesküvők a huszadik századi Magyarországon* [The credit of progress: Progressiveness, scapegoats, conspirers in twentieth-century Hungary] (Budapest, Akadémiai, 2010), 171.

1867. As it is well known, with the Austro-Hungarian Compromise the nation-building process has been resumed, accompanied by the enactment of the civic emancipation of Jews as one of its first major legal acts in December 1867, without any parliamentary opposition. But it must be recognized with a most competent observer of the history of Jews in Hungary, that “unlike ... in the West, the emancipation of the Jews was promoted not so much in terms of the liberal philosophy of the enlightenment, but primarily as an aspect of the idea of Hungarian nationalism.”⁸

In former historical reports on Jewry in Hungary, this period was often described as the “Golden Age,” justified by collective achievements registered in terms of social integration, nationalization (Magyarization), upward socio-professional mobility, and “modernization.”⁹

Before 1919: Behind the Façade of the “Golden Age”

There were two patterns of the process of Jewish emancipation in Europe—the abrupt one, like it was implemented in France by the revolutionary national assembly in two laws, and the protracted ones, like in England. The first was typical of established nation-states where Jews had been submitted to a number of professional, political, fiscal, residential, and legal handicaps, prohibitions and incapacities before emancipation. The second pattern concerned mostly countries with limited Jewish populations and where the settlement of Jews was not met with major social discriminations. Hungary was in-between these two extremes. There were early and decisive steps toward the formal integration and the equalization of the social condition of Jews, starting with Joseph II’s “Jewish decree” (1783)—the first ever such measure in Europe in the sense of the Enlightenment. This was followed by progressive legal actions, notably the 1840/XXIX law “of semi-emancipation” and the symbolic act of July 1849, emanating—under duress, before its fall—from the revolutionary

⁸ Braham, *The Holocaust in Hungary*, 8.

⁹ The pre-1919 “Golden Age” of Hungarian Jewry used to be the major historical myth of Jewish historiography before the Shoah. It was duly challenged in later historical research. “But it was ... during this Golden Era that Hungarian Jewry sowed the seeds of its demise after World War I” (Braham, 2); Géza Komoróczy, *A zsidók története Magyarországon, II. 1849-től a jelenkorig* [History of the Jews in Hungary, vol. 2: From 1849 to the present era] (Pozsony: Kalligram, 2012), passim.

national assembly in Szeged. The reason behind this “intermediary” pattern might have had to do with the relatively good reception of the incoming Jewish immigration by the nobility, the titular elite of the feudal state, that is, by the very “intermediary” situation of Jews in the country as compared to other contemporary European states. Though Jews remained overtaxed (but only until 1846) by the government), excluded from corporations and restricted in their economic activities and professional advancement in many ways, there were no quotidian harassments, no recurrent pogroms (the 1848 April outbursts proved to be exceptional till until 1883), no educational segregation or exclusion, unlike in neighboring countries.

The story continued in the same vein on the whole until the end of the historic state during the liberal Dual Monarchy. Governments and the ruling parties, more or less systematically, manifested pro-Jewish attitudes with—as a more than symbolic date—the “reception law” in 1895, granting the Israelite religion the same public dignity and support as was due to the Christian “received churches.” When Jews were in danger, like during the riots accompanying the Tiszaeszlár blood libel trial (1882–83), both the tribunal and the armed forces did their best to maintain law and order. Members of the Jewish elites were integrated in the political establishment in charge, including the parliament and the administrative staff, though only more or less symbolically as indicators of political liberalism before the turn of the century. Their presence in parliament became more visible under the governments of István Tisza after 1905. In 1910 deputies of Jewish birth or origin occupied some 22% of seats in the National Assembly, mostly on the banks of the government party.¹⁰ In the very last governments of the Dual Monarchy the first and only minister of Jewish faith, Vilmos Vázsonyi, took office. Officially, the Hungarian state followed the path of its Western, more democratic counterparts via the constant care for securing for Jews the benefit of formal civic equality, occasionally even confirming it by targeted measures or symbolic gestures and, when necessary, protecting Jews from mob rule.

As an additional example, one can refer to the financial support distributed to ecclesiastical primary schools, especially after the 1907 Lex Apponyi to promote Magyar tuition. In 1905/6, 63.5% of the 466 Jewish schools received some state funding as against 59.4% of other nonstate

¹⁰ Andrew C. Janos, *The Politics of Backwardness in Hungary, 1825–1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 178.

schools (including municipal ones).¹¹ This proportion mounted to 97.5% by 1913/14 against 84.1% of other nonstate schools.¹² But while Jewish schools, in general better staffed and equipped than others,¹³ had enjoyed limited funding per institution before the Lex Apponyi (326 forints against an average of 416 in 1905/6),¹⁴ by 1913/14 they became by far the best endowed institutions of primary education with a mean benefit of 2,223 forints against a general average of 1,696 only emanating from the government.¹⁵ This is just one but rather typical example of the more than fair treatment reserved for the Jewish institutional network by the authorities, in appreciation—obviously enough—of the exceptionally successful endeavors of Jewish educational boards at the Magyarization of the institutions under their supervision.

Still, in spite of such Western-looking liberalism, the Jewish policy of the national officialdom was not without preserving aspects of the former negative distinction of Jews among non-Magyar ethnic-cultural clusters. It is true though that, even before the adoption of the “reception law” in 1895, Jews ceased to be regarded as an ethnic minority and were listed exclusively among religious denominations. Since the 1880s statistical references to Jews were restricted to their denominational particularism, unlike earlier, when they were listed among ethnic clusters like Germans, Slovaks, etc. (One of the unfortunate consequence of this move was that in ethnic statistics—based on mother tongue or “first employed language” Jews were henceforth dispersed among “Germans,” “Magyars,” and—to a lesser degree—“Slovaks,” since Yiddish was not officially recognized as a specific indicator of ethnicity.) The “confessionalization” of Jewry—former Jews, those of Mosaic faith, Hebrews, etc., unanimously becoming “Israelites” in official texts, like in statistical publications—was certainly a move toward the public redefinition of Jews as an integral component of mainstream “national” population, much as it happened in Western Europe. Moreover, while in the same publications Jews used to appear in the bottom line as a last—and a quasi-additional—category, this too changed

¹¹ *Magyar statisztikai évkönyv* [Hungarian statistical yearbook] (1906), 351.

¹² *Magyar statisztikai évkönyv* (1914), 253.

¹³ As demonstrated for example in data cited in my *Iskolarendszer és felekezeti egyenlőtlenségek Magyarországon (1867–1945)* [School system and denominational inequalities, 1867–1945] (Budapest: Replika-könyvek, 1997), 28, 103.

¹⁴ *Magyar statisztikai évkönyv* (1906), 351.

¹⁵ *Magyar statisztikai évkönyv* (1914), 253.

with the “reception” of Baptists in 1895. Henceforth Baptists came as the last among equally “received faiths” in state-sponsored documents.

But similar—to be true, purely symbolical—egalitarianism did not exist at all to the same degree in occupational markets supervised by public authorities. It is true that the 1883 “qualification law” linked the appointment to various hierarchical positions in the civil service exclusively to prescribed levels of schooling (from four secondary school classes, as the lowest level, up to specialized university degrees via graduation from a secondary school). Job markets were, however, by tacit but firm consensus, separated in two parts: the public sector remaining in practice the preserve of qualified Christians, while the private economic sector was open indiscriminately to Jews as well as to others. This was of course an informal arrangement, to be true, however efficiently it remained observed. Though Jewish proportions among students—would-be intellectuals of all sorts—oscillated around one-fifth and one-fourth of the national student body in the decades around 1900, reaching altogether as much as 37% at the Budapest Faculty of Law (1872–1918),¹⁶ Jews would hardly attain in administrative or judicial civil service the lowest demographic share of their kin group in the population, even in spite of the regular growth of this share from 3.1% in 1890 to 4.3% in 1900¹⁷ and 5.2% in 1910.¹⁸ More importantly, one reason for such low proportions lay not only in a scheme of rejection or discrimination but in the implicit expectation that Jews should get baptized when appointed to a position of public power and prestige. Unlike in the West, behind formal legal equality, there was in Hungary (just like in the rest of Central and Eastern Europe after emancipation, Germany included) a more or less unofficial institutionalized discrimination before the civil service at large, covering as different markets of educated middle-class careers as the judiciary, politics, public administration, health services, academe, local municipal or regional industries and communications (railways, urban transportation, electricity, water or gas supply, etc.) and all levels of centrally controlled

¹⁶ For details pertaining to the ethnic recruitment of all the sixty-five or so secular institutions of higher education attended by students from Hungary in the late Dualist era (in and outside the country), see my recent overview: “Les Allemands dans l’intelligentsia moderne émergente en Hongrie à l’époque de la Double Monarchie,” *Austriaca* 1 (2012): 193–221.

¹⁷ Data computed from *Magyar statisztikai közlemények* [Hungarian statistical reports] 16, (1906), 134–199.

¹⁸ Data computed from *Magyar statisztikai közlemények* 56, (1915), 712–25.

education. Even if some progress can be detected when we compare data on the Jewish presence in the civil service between 1890 and 1910, as cited above, this proved to be fragile. The proportion of Jews declined, for example, among the staff of higher education from 10% to 6.5%.¹⁹ Some of this change was certainly due to religious conversions and not only to the reluctance of academic and ministerial authorities to appoint qualified Jews in academe, since such nominations continued until 1919—even if with somewhat diminishing intensity after 1905.²⁰

Moreover, given the spectacularly unequal capacity of Jews and gentiles for “modernization” in general, particularly as this was reflected in enhanced Jewish educational and professional mobility in the most modern fields of middle-class activities—industrial, financial, commercial, and lately even agricultural entrepreneurship, medicine, the bar, engineering, veterinary science, the press, the arts (like photography or filmmaking), etc.—this was duly registered from very early onward (since at least 1890) in statistical publications, while leaving aside—strangely enough—their not less spectacular hegemony in the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie. The estate-owning rural elite figured always in categories distinct from the petty or landless peasantry; this did not apply to “industrial independents.” In the latter cluster small and big businessmen appeared always in collapsed categories combined with other, regularly applied variables like mother tongue (instead of ethnicity) and denomination. This may have been connected to the fact that governments of the liberal era formed an alliance of sorts with the big entrepreneurial class and—most specifically—with its largely Jewish protagonists. This was particularly manifest at the end of the Dualist era under István Tisza. Jewish entrepreneurs, on the strength of their mutually supportive relationship with governmental circles, might have deserved thus the absence of any distinction in official publications liable to be interpreted in a derogatory way by the public.

Inequalities of modernization were just as strongly reflected in the composition of antigovernmental think tanks and study circles. This growing camp of the liberal regime’s modernist and Western-minded opposition was recruited from employed or liberal professionals (whose agency was crystallized in the Society for Social Science [1901] or its

¹⁹ *Magyar statisztikai közlemények* 64, (1924), 314.

²⁰ I. Gábor Kovács, “Magyarországi zsidó és zsidó származású egyetemi tanárok sorsa a holokauszt erőterében 1930-tól 1945-ig” [The fate of Hungarian university professors of Jewish faith or origin in the field of force of the Holocaust from 1930 to 1945], *Múlt és jövő* (2014): 91–95, see 91.

influential avant-garde, the Galilei Circle [1908]) with heavy, indeed overwhelming Jewish participation. The presence of Jewish intellectuals appears to have been indeed paramount in all the oppositional movements of the Left, especially in their leadership.²¹ I have estimated in a special prosopographical research of members of the Galilei Circle that over 80% of them were formally Jewish.

The scholarly attention informing these as yet mild forms of selective but efficient anti-Jewish stigmatization encountered since the early years of the twentieth century, in the years of the preparation and the aftermath of the secularization laws of “denominational policy” (1894–96), the renewal of the anti-Jewish moves of the conservative antigovernmental and antiliberal opposition, mostly under the aegis of the Roman Catholic Church. It included various measures of properly political, institutional, and civic nature, more and more orchestrated in mounting tides of public antisemitic agitation, starting in the 1890s. The influential Roman Catholic bishop Ottokár Prohászka published his first anti-Jewish diatribes as early as 1893 when the project to make the Jewish faith a “received religion” was put on the agenda of liberal policy-makers.²² The Catholic People’s Party surfaced in the same period (1895) with a program to defend “agrarian interests,” essentially against the Jewish bourgeoisie. The *Hangya* (Ants) movement appeared in the late 1890s with the explicit objective to

²¹ For details, see Janos, *The Politics of Backwardness*, 177. The author refers to the Galileo Circle as the melting pot of contemporary and future leftist elites: “The members and the sympathizers of this circle were later heavily involved in the Radical, Socialist and Communist parties” (ibid., 174). See also György Litván, “Szellemi progresszió a századelőn. A zsidóság szerepvállalása a társadalmi-politikai modernizációért vívott küzdelmekben” [Intellectual progressiveness at the start of the century: The Jewish role in the fight for social and political modernization] (1989) in *Zsidók a magyar társadalomban* [Jews in Hungarian society], ed. Géza Komoróczy (Pozsony: Kalligram, 2015), 633–42.

²² Let it suffice to cite the full title of Prohászka’s first glose on Jews: “A zsidó recepció a moralitás szempontjából. A zsidóság fekélye már csontvázzá rágta a keresztény Magyar népet” [Jewish reception as a moral issue: The ulcer of Jewry has gnawed the Hungarian Christian people to a skeleton], in *Zsidók a magyar társadalomban* [Jews in Hungarian society], ed. Géza Komoróczy (Pozsony: Kalligram, 2015), 566–77. See also Csaba Fazekas, “‘Numerus Clausus Represents a Strong National Ideology’: Bishop Ottokár Prohászka and the Closed Number Law in Hungary,” in *The Numerus Clausus in Hungary: Studies on the First Anti-Jewish Law and Academic Anti-Semitism in Modern Central Europe*, ed. Victor Karady and Péter Tibor Nagy (Budapest: Pasts Inc., 2012), 165–75, especially 166. Available at: <http://elites08.uni.hu>, <http://mek.oszk.hu>.

defend the petty land-owning clusters against the "business spirit which under the disguise of loans injected its poison into rural people who, in the midst of the ills of agriculture, eagerly leapt on this mortal succor"—as stated in the movement's hardly coded anti-Jewish message.²³ According to a relevant county report in 1902, "the Ants networks are ... unconditional antisemites and their main task is to 'exterminate' the Jewish shopkeepers."²⁴ In 1899 began the prolonged agitation at the University of Budapest organized by Catholic students for the display of the crucifix in lecture halls in order to stress the initially Catholic character of the institution.²⁵ Militant Catholicism with strongly anti-Jewish undertones in its public discourse founded a whole set of institutional infrastructure in the early years of the twentieth century. The Congregation of the Holy Mary (*Mária kongregáció* [1900]), the network of elite circles *Regnum Marianum* (founded by Prohászka himself), the renewal of the Catholic press (thanks to activities of the Jesuit Béla Bangha), together with the expansion of the *Szent István Társulat*—a publishing house and a forum of the Catholic intellectual elite, leading to the foundation of a distinct Catholic Academy²⁶—constituted the main buttresses of politically conservative, antiliberal, militant Catholicism carrying and diffusing more and more explicitly anti-Jewish messages.

The ruin of the landowning gentry and its social conversion into a dominant sector of the state bureaucracy did not dilute nostalgic *ressentiments* nurtured by many—erstwhile liberal—members of this class against the upcoming rural capitalism fed mostly by Jewish investments. The new landowners or leaseholders of landed estates were indeed mostly Jewish.²⁷

²³ In 1901 the Ants network had some 30,500 members, while at the end of the Dualist era over 658,000. See Miklós Szabó, *Politikai kultúra Magyarországon 1896–1986* [Political culture in Hungary, 1896–1986] (Budapest: Medvetánc könyvek, 1989), 148.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 151.

²⁵ Miklós Szabó, "Az 1901-es egyetemi 'kereszt-mozgalom'. Adalék a magyarországi szélsőjobboldal előtörténetéhez" [The "Holy Cross movement" in 1901: Contribution to the prehistory of right extremism in Hungary], *Történelmi szemle* (April 1970): 483–516.

²⁶ The *Szent István Akadémia*, founded in 1915, became the Catholic equivalent of the historic, state-supported and denominationally neutral Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

²⁷ In 1910 Jews represented 10.8% of owners of large and middle-sized landed estates, but 48.6% of leaseholders above 100 holds, the main form of capitalist investment in and management of rural properties. Cf. *Magyar statisztikai közlemények* 56, (1915), 444, 449, 457.

This helped to consolidate the neoconservative “agrarian movement” with an openly antisemitic program, which successive governments tended to adopt or at least pay lip service to. An infamous case of state-sponsored social political program was the scheme managed by Ede Egán to provide landed properties to Ukrainian peasants with the aim, among other things, to help them escape Jewish usurers in the Subcarpathian region.²⁸ This action, terminated by the unsolved murder of its commissioner in 1901, triggered large scale antisemitic press campaigns, especially in journals of “agrarian” movement, masterminded by leaders of the Catholic People’s Party.²⁹ The conservative turn contributed to link Jews, as main beneficiaries, with the post-1867 liberal era and brought about a decisive split in the emerging modern middle classes. This will be one of the major theses exposed in the most influential historical study of the period—its crushingly critical balance sheet of sorts—Szekfű’s *Three Generations*.³⁰ The association of Jews with the officially reigning political liberalism, especially with its latest and rather authoritarian rehash under Prime Minister István Tisza, a convinced philo-Semite, could be objectified by the high degree of representation of Jews in policy-making bodies.³¹ In the early twentieth century governmental philo-Semitism was already fiercely combated by the rightist-conservative opposition (heavily supported by the Catholic Church). In the same time the mounting tide of leftist movements, heavily invested by Jewish intellectuals, severely judged and mistrusted the alliance of the Jewish bourgeoisie with the liberal-conservative establishment of Tisza’s type.

An indirect expression of in-depth changes reflecting such lines of opposition can be detected already in the progressive segregation of Jewish secondary school pupils on the educational market as well. Wherever there was a choice between Catholic and other gymnasiums or *Realschulen* in the same town (the Catholic Church being at that time still the biggest insti-

²⁸ Szabó, *Politikai kultúra*, 148–50.

²⁹ Miklós Bartha, “A ‘Kazár-földön’ és a sajtó” [In “Kazár land” and the press], in *Bartha Miklós összegyűjtött munkái* [The collected works of Miklós Bartha] (Budapest, 1908–13), vol. 1, 301–71. See also Szabó, *Politikai kultúra*, 148–50.

³⁰ Gyula Szekfű, *Három nemzedék* [Three generations] (Budapest, 1920).

³¹ “[I]f before the elections of 1905 there were only a few token Jewish deputies in the House of Representatives, between the years 1905 and 1910, this number increased to 102. In 1910 they occupied some 22% of parliamentary mandates” (Janos, *The Politics of Backwardness*, 178).

tutional entrepreneur in elite training³²), Jewish pupils were increasingly discouraged from attending Catholic institutions and instead opted for Protestant, municipal or state schools, which were considered to be free of (or less inclined to) anti-Jewish discrimination. Budapest was a major case in point in this respect. In the years 1850–1900 14.7% of graduates of the old Piarist Gymnasium (founded in 1717) were Jewish and this level of Jewish presence was maintained afterward until 1910 (14.1%)—that is, for pupils entering secondary school in 1903 at the latest. In the following decade the figure fell to 5.3% in 1910–19.³³ This was a reversal of a century-old trend preceding the "laws of Church policy" (1894–96)—a period before which no such segregation could be statistically demonstrated.³⁴

Anti-Jewish agitation in such papers as the *Alkotmány* [Constitution] was often grounded on statistical references to "Jewish abuses," such as the purchase of formerly gentry properties.³⁵ Statistics showing the distinct position of Jews in terms of urbanization, professional stratification or advanced schooling started to be exploited thus very early in the anti-Jewish discourse of the emerging radical-conservative right. In 1907, with reference to the high proportion of Jews who held university places, a rightist MP, Károly Hencz, went so far as to demand the implementation of an anti-Jewish academic *numerus clausus*. Besides articles by intellectual standard-bearers for modernizing Catholicism (like Prohászka or Bangha), popular books by rightist authors (such as Géza Petrássevich³⁶ or Kálmán Weszprémy³⁷) introduced fundamental thematic formulations of the public stigmatization of Jews based on statistical examinations of the "Jewish

³² At the turn of the century there were still thirty-two Catholic full gymnasiums and ten "royal Catholic" ones (funded from the income of properties erstwhile belonging Catholic congregations expropriated at the end of the eighteenth century) as against only twenty-seven state or municipal gymnasiums, four private ones and forty-three belonging to all kinds of other Christian churches (*Magyar statisztikai évkönyv* [1901], 337–38).

³³ Computed from my prosopographic survey of secondary school graduates accomplished in the framework of the research project ELITES08 funded by the European Research Council (directed with Péter Tibor Nagy).

³⁴ See the relevant data in my book: *Iskolarendszer és felekezeti egyenlőtlenségek Magyarországon (1867–1945)* [School system and denominational inequalities in Hungary, 1867–1945] (Budapest: Replika könyvek, 1997), 162–63.

³⁵ Szabó, *Politikai kultúra*, 184–95.

³⁶ *Magyarország és a zsidóság* [Hungary and the Jews] (1900); *Zsidó földbirtokosok* [Jewish landowners] (1904).

³⁷ *A magyarországi zsidóságról* [About Jewry in Hungary] (1907).

invasion" (of the middle-class professions), their "conquest or occupation of social space," "the exploitation of Christians by Jews," and "capitalism as a Jewish invention to this effect."³⁸ However, discourses of this type did fail to enter into official publications in the Dualist era.

The public denunciation of Jews in the Catholic press was exacerbated over time and became part of an openly hysterical anti-Jewish campaign during the war years. Some authors perceive a turn for the worse in 1916. The new areas of emphasis for those engaged in antisemitic agitation concerned economic abuses attributed to Jewish entrepreneurs with army commissions, the "war profiteers," those "running up prices," shirkers of military service in the trenches, etc. Such discourses entered into parliamentary debates as well, especially after the appointment to the cabinet of Vilmos Vázsonyi as minister of justice and electoral reform (1917–18). Bishop Prohászka raised again in parliament the demand for an academic numerus clausus and initiated several press assaults against Jews, the last one during the summer of 1918, just before the fall of the Liberal regime. In the last years of the war the separation of the Catholic press and the liberal one was topographically implemented by selling the journals respectively at different newspaper stands and street corners in the capital city.³⁹

The negative distinction of Jews in Hungarian society was a topic restricted not only to conservative or rightist antigovernmental circles. It was publicly discussed several times in organs of the rising leftist opposition as well, such as those of the Galilei Circle or the Society for Social Science. After the publication of Péter Ágoston's book *A zsidók útja* (The road of the Jews),⁴⁰ a debate on antisemitism was launched.⁴¹ In a much publicized inquiry addressed to intellectuals and public figures whether "A Jewish question existed or not," the majority of responses (thirty-seven) was

³⁸ A knowledgeable specialist mentions "the as yet undisclosed ant-Semitic literature of brochures at the turn of the century." See János Gyurgyák, *A zsidókérdés Magyarországon* [The Jewish question in Hungary] (Budapest: Osiris, 2001), 640.

³⁹ Peter Bihari, *Lövészárkok a hátszágban, Középosztály, zsidókérdés, antiszemitizmus az első világháború Magyarországon* [Trenches in the hinterland: The middle class, the Jewish Question, and antisemitism in Hungary during the First World War] (Budapest: Napvilág, 2008), 238.

⁴⁰ Peter Ágoston, *A zsidók útja* [The road of the Jews] (Nagyvárad, 1916).

⁴¹ Mária Ormos, *A katedrától a halálsorig, Ágoston Péter 1874–1925* [From academic chair to the death cell: Peter Ágoston, 1874–1925] (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2011), 110–120.

positive and only a few (thirteen) argued in the negative.⁴² It is not difficult to find anti-Jewish utterances by leading figures of left radicalism (such as Oszkár Jászi—of Jewish background himself, unlike Ágoston).⁴³ Such statements were often directed against members of the Jewish entrepreneurial class, which benefited (even sometimes fraudulently, to be sure—just like others) from war deliveries. They targeted implicitly or explicitly the pro-Jewish stance of István Tisza’s government in support of and supported by the Jewish economic elite. Tisza indeed went so far in his wartime efforts to curb the mounting tide of antisemitism as to forbid antisemitic journals.⁴⁴

Such a polarized state of public opinion served to keep the “Jewish question” on the agenda whenever social issues were addressed. As one sharp-minded observer of the situation summed it up: “[D]uring World War I mass feelings about Jews underwent a radical change.... Probably the majority of the Hungarian population ... having [until then] kept a correct but distant attitude vis-à-vis Jews, turned more and more anti-Jewish, the hitherto continuously prevalent antisemitic currents and movements gained strength and their societal support grew also significantly.”⁴⁵

Continuities and Immediate Precedents in the Interwar Years

The new epoch started with the fall of the Monarchy in October 1918, followed by the Communist takeover in March 1919 and the White Terror that followed (starting in August 1919). The change of political regime, quickly nicknamed the “Christian Course,” has been amply exposed in current historical narratives. Let me simply try to summarize its main implications as to the development of what was henceforth commonly qualified as the “Jewish question.” This was certainly the rupture of an age long development that can be traced back, in concrete terms, to the

⁴² Péter Hanák, ed., *Zsidókérdés, asszimiláció, antiszemitizmus* [The Jewish Question, assimilation, antisemitism] (Budapest: Gondolat, 1984), 15–115 (large extracts from the inquiry).

⁴³ As can be imagined, this highly controversial issue has been investigated by a number of authoritative authors who have come to a variety of conclusions: György Litván, *Jászi Oszkár* (Budapest, Osiris, 2003), 114–15; János Pelle, *Jászi Oszkár. Életrajzi, eszme- és kortörténeti esszé* [Oszkár Jászi: An essay on biographical, intellectual and contemporary history] (Budapest: XX. Század Intézet, 2001), 226–34 and 236–65 *passim*.

⁴⁴ Gyurgyák, *A zsidókérdés Magyarországon*, 96.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.

“Jewish decree” by Emperor Joseph II (1782), accompanied by a quasi-progressive extension of rights, security and public dignity granted to Jews. In all these matters the upturn proved to be radical indeed after 1919.

In order to specify the main aspects of the change liable to be connected in terms of continuity to the post-1938 anti-Jewish legislation and to the Shoah, the main points will be numbered in the following.

1. *State violence against Jews.* The leftist governmental circles of the two “revolutionary” establishments were—for the first time in the country—heavily invested by mostly fully secularized (that is “dejudaized”) Jewish intellectuals and journalists. This applied according to contemporary listings to eleven of the twenty members of the National Council in October 1919⁴⁶ and to some thirty-one out of forty-five “people’s commissars” of the Soviet regime.⁴⁷ This fact, besides the failure of the given governing bodies to control the political, economic, and military crisis of the postwar situation leading finally to the disastrous Treaty of Trianon (in June 1920) and the dismembering of the historic state, triggered off immediate anti-Jewish reactions. Instances of “spontaneous” anti-Jewish violence (including murders) were noted during the months of the Károlyi government,⁴⁸ independently from government policies.

This cannot be stated about the Soviet Republic marked by both spontaneous and government-sponsored antisemitic incidents. This was not only due to the bloody persecution of members of the capitalist classes—some 7.4% to 11% of the victims proper of the Red Terror were apparently Jewish⁴⁹—but also to the antiparticularistic (and antireligious) drive of the regime animated by the universalist utopia of Bolshevism. At the national gathering of the Soviet Councils on June 21 “the majority of delegates meant Jews when talking about the bourgeoisie.”⁵⁰ The Communist authorities deported in July 1919 several hundred Galician Jewish refugees to Poland.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Ibid., 98.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 102.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 100.

⁴⁹ See Janos, *The Politics of Backwardness*, 182; *Magyar Zsidó Lexikon* (Budapest, 1929), 290; Komoróczy, *A zsidók története Magyarországon*, 363. Among political hostages taken by the Communist regime in Budapest some 19% were also Jewish, according to the *Magyar Zsidó Lexikon*, 220.

⁵⁰ Gyurgyák, *A zsidókérdés Magyarországon*, 103.

⁵¹ Ibid., 737.

The local Jewish population itself was manifestly divided in this critical situation. The counterrevolutionary National Army under Horthy, gathering first in Szeged, had a number of local Jewish supporters as well as officers proper. The minister of justice of the first "White" government in Arad was Jewish and Jewish participation was noted in the Anti-Bolshevist Committee organized in Szeged. This could not prevent the fall of the Hungarian Commune from instantly provoking an unprecedented anti-Jewish backlash culminating in an indiscriminately murderous rampage of uncontrolled White Terror squads. The majority of their victims, the numbers of which were estimated between some 600 and over 2,000, appeared to be Jewish.⁵² The new type of—often publicly sponsored—discourse on Jews by rightist MPs or even members of government, made them collectively responsible for both the war defeat and the revolutionary turmoil and excesses. Such a scapegoat complex lent itself to easy exploitation,⁵³ given the notable Jewish representation in leftist movements and parties preparing the 1918–19 crisis,⁵⁴ but ignored of course the fierce opposition of the Jewish bourgeoisie (including its numerous petit bourgeois elements) against leftist political options.

With the evocation of the White Terror, however transitory it may have been, one touches upon the first major historical transformation of the situation of Jews in Hungary. It can be regarded as a direct precedent, instrumental in the later public acceptance—the social legitimization of sorts, hence the very feasibility—of the Shoah.

There had been earlier tragically violent anti-Jewish incidents, though with few casualties, in Hungarian history, especially during the nineteenth century. Pogroms claimed innocent Jewish victims in late March and in April 1848 in several places (like Pozsony/Bratislava), just as in the aftermath of the infamous Tiszaeszlár blood libel trial in 1883. But such cases of mob rule were regularly opposed and repressed by the public powers. None of them was implemented with the complicity of the authorities. In 1919, however, killings of Jews in Orgovány, Siófok, and elsewhere were carried out by official or unofficial representatives of the state. For the first times since the recapture of the Buda fortress from the Ottomans (1686), an army rabble carried out full-scale massacres of Jews in

⁵² Janos, *The Politics of Backwardness*, 202.

⁵³ On the problem of political scapegoating, see Pók, *A haladás hitele*, 159–64.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 199. Janos estimates that 45% of the participants in leftist movements and parties in 1900–1919 were Jewish, a possible underestimation of the real proportions.

the name of the Hungarian Kingdom. Even if the successively established governments in Budapest and the head of the newborn National Army, Admiral Horthy, denied their involvement in the atrocities and after a while took measures to effectively control the death squads, such state-sponsored violence against Jews remained inscribed in collective memory as an already (and recently) experimented option in policies concerning Jews. Unlike in the Dual Monarchy and earlier, Jews could no longer be assured that the state would apply to them as to other citizens the principles of the legal order to protect their security and property. On the contrary, it occurred henceforth that the hitherto most reliable legal mechanism—the judiciary—failed to fulfill its role of safeguard or recourse when the security of Jews was at stake. After the bestial assassination (authorized by the probable consent of Admiral Horthy⁵⁵) of two Jewish journalists of the social-democratic paper *Népszava* in February 1920, Béla Somogyi and Béla Bacsó, there was an extended judicial procedure against the culprits, active officers of the National Army who would not deny their crime. The royal court of Budapest exempted them in November 1930 from further prosecution with the following justification: “The accused, even if they committed their deed, did it with the erroneous conviction that their action was serving the interests of the Magyar race and the national ideal.”⁵⁶ Such a precedent for legalized anti-Jewish violence would not be forgotten by army and gendarmerie officers—often the same individuals as those serving in parliament, in the death squads of the White Terror or in counterrevolutionary “university squadrons” in 1919–20. Many of them came to be involved in the organization of anti-Jewish atrocities in the early 1940s⁵⁷ against deported “aliens” to Kamianets-Podilskyi (summer of 1941), forced labor servicemen in the Ukraine (starting with 1941), rank and file citizens in Újvidék/Novi Sad (January 1942) or in other newly recaptured territories, representing the initial stages of the Shoah

⁵⁵ “According to the testimony of Ödön Beniczky, then minister of the interior, who committed suicide in 1925 in consequence,... the murder was allegedly instigated by Horthy himself” (Braham, 19).

⁵⁶ Cited in the Hungarian Wikipedia article dedicated to the event. The mass murderers of the White Terror, the group of Mihály Francia Kiss, was amnestied in 1921 with the same argument in the judgment (Komoróczy, *A zsidók története Magyarországon*, 414).

⁵⁷ A case in point is Emil Kovarcz, member of the murderous Ostenburg officers’ squad, resuming his anti-Jewish terrorist activities after 1938, too (Braham, 9). It is easy to find others in the same case. See also Komoróczy, *A zsidók története Magyarországon*, 363 (for József Grassy).

in Hungary. The same applied to major political actors as well, involved in the implementation of the anti-Jewish legislation in the 1920s just like after 1938.⁵⁸

2. *Privately organized anti-Jewish violence: verbal and physical.* This tacitly admitted state violence could only encourage or stimulate violent forms of "spontaneous" mob rule at the expense of Jews. This is the second major new aspect of the situation as regards Jews during the whole period of the "Christian Course." Local public violence accompanied by inflammatory anti-Jewish rhetoric was rampant in many places since October 1918, but at that time it was still systematically condemned and repressed by the new authorities in charge. In December 1918 a university professor advocated at a student gathering in Debrecen the staging of "spiritual pogroms" against Jews.⁵⁹ But a year later a "National Antisemitic Party" was founded.⁶⁰ In July 1920 the rightist deputy Budaváry proposes to parliament the limitation of Jewish rights for property ownership and professional pursuits.⁶¹ Another deputy, Károly Ereky went in February 1920 as far as declaring literally: "If ... the Jewish press does not stop its ... attacks against Christians, you would not only be beaten up, but Jewry will be massacred in Hungary!"⁶²

It is true though that during and after the White Terror proper the new governments paid lip service against exacerbations of street violence without actually stopping the spread of physical outrage which Jews were henceforth liable to encounter in public places. In the hysterically anti-Jewish atmosphere reigning in parliament just as much as in the rightist press, Jews could be insulted, assaulted, beaten up, and menaced in public places without much consequences, in spite of the diligence of the "government of consolidation" headed by count Bethlen (1921–31) to wipe out right extremism. In universities, Jewish secondary school graduates were regularly prevented from enrolling in 1919 and were frequently harassed on the footsteps of the entrance. Starting in 1919, "Jew beatings"

⁵⁸ This can be easily exemplified by the simple fact that the prime minister proposing the numerus clausus in September 1920 and the so-called "Second anti-Jewish law" with its racial definition of Jews (1939/IV) was the same: Count Pál Teleki. See Braham, 30.

⁵⁹ Gyurgyák, *A zsidókérdés Magyarországon*, 736.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 737.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 738.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 122.

became ritual exercises of rightist students every now and then throughout the interwar years under the tacit consent or at least toleration of ministerial and academic authorities who, in the worst cases, simply closed down the premises affected.⁶³ Assaults on Jewish staffed and run oppositional journals and printing houses became a habit. More than just “spontaneous” forms of mob rule, such patterns of violence were quasi-institutionalized by new antisemitic organizations and agencies, like rightist student corporations (*Turul*⁶⁴ or *Hungária*⁶⁵) or the Hungarian National Defense Association (*MOVE*, founded as early as November 1918). The latter defined itself at its foundation (as early as November 1919) to be “committed to racial defense, Christian and national in spirit.” Their actions were completed by those of “Awakening Magyars” (*Ébredők*)—including, among other misdeeds, the devastation of a “Jewish” café house followed by the assassination of a Jewish banker (July 1920). This was too much even for the Teleki government then in charge, and as a consequence the movement was formally banned, though its militants and sympathizers filled several banks of the parliament and government offices. Murderous attempts,⁶⁶ forceful disruptions of Jewish gatherings, assaults of Jewish personalities went on throughout the interwar years.⁶⁷

3. *Institutionalization of the social exclusion of Jews: Anti-Jewish or “Jew-free” political, social, and professional gatherings.* The new situation was marked by the birth and proliferation of various social circles or associations—sometimes with specific professional, political, ideological, cultural or sportive targets—the common feature of which was anti-Jewish agency and exclusiveness. Such establishments happened to appear already before 1918, like

⁶³ On the first waves of anti-Jewish student violence, see Andor Ladányi, *Az egyetem-i ifjúság az ellenforradalom első éveiben (1919–1921)* [The academic youth in the first years of the counterrevolution, 1919–1921] (Budapest, Akadémiai, 1979).

⁶⁴ See Róbert Kerepeszki, “‘The Racial Defense in Practice’: The Activity of the Turul Association at Hungarian Universities between the Two World Wars,” in *The Numerus Clausus in Hungary: Studies on the First Anti-Jewish Law and Academic Anti-Semitism in Modern Central Europe*, ed. Victor Karady and Péter Tibor Nagy (Budapest: Pasts Inc., 2012), 136–49.

⁶⁵ The “racial purity” of members was so strictly required in *Hungária* that aspirants had to document their Christian ancestry back to their grandparents (very much what happened in 1939 regarding the distinction between Jews and non-Jews following the second anti-Jewish law) (Ungváry, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege*, 90).

⁶⁶ Like the one against Vilmos Vázsonyi by two “Awakeners” in February 1926.

⁶⁷ Ungváry, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege*, 112.

the Catholic Teachers' Association, to counterbalance the spread of leftist orientation in the teaching corps of secondary schools, but this was a rather exceptional occurrence at that time.⁶⁸ However, in the very years during and after the White Terror, a number of "national" professional associations were born, "national" taking henceforth the meaning of "Christian," that is "Jew free" and decisively antisemitic. This was the case of physicians (National Association of Hungarian Medical Doctors [*MONE*]), lawyers (National Association of Hungarian Lawyers [*MŰNE*]), and engineers (National Association of Hungarian Engineers and Architects [*MMÉNE*]). The main aim of such organizations was the fight against Jewish influence in their respective professional chambers, to limit or prevent the promotion of Jews in academic or other positions connected to their craft, and to lobby in governmental circles for the extension of the share of their members in respective professional markets to the detriment of Jews. If one reads the official publications emanating from their headquarters, there is a clear continuity of Jew baiting and anti-Jewish lobbying from the early 1920s and the years of legal antisemitism conducive to the Shoah.⁶⁹ Some of these self-proclaimed, nonpolitical, but only professional agencies constituted the vanguard of middle class institutions (especially the doctor's association) which mobilized themselves in 1944 for the expropriation and gentlemanly plundering of the offices and dispensaries of their Jewish partners and copractitioners.

But "Jewless" associations were not restricted to the professional sphere. Thus, a fundamental division of elite groups was organized from the 1920s onward with full continuity until the 1940s, comprising—often explicitly—the stigmatization of Jewish sectors of the same groups. The earlier institutional melting pots of Jewish assimilation, places of mixing, exchange and cooperation of Jews as non-Jews, more or less disappeared or lost their leverage or acumen, like the liberal parties of the Dualist era. In the same vein, the influential agents of Hungarian Liberalism, the lodges of the Freemasons were dissolved and banned in May 1920, a heavy blow on a sector of the socially active Jewish middle strata, contributing to their social segregation. Besides them a number of intellectual societies, private clubs and circles, reserved tables or rooms in pubs,

⁶⁸ Miklós Szabó qualified this trend as "preventive counterrevolution." See his *Az újkonzervatizmus és a jobboldali radikalizmus története (1867–1918)* [History of neoconservitism and right radicalism, 1867–1918] (Budapest, 2003), 322–28.

⁶⁹ Mária M. Kovács, *Liberal Professions, Illiberal Politics: Hungary from Habsburgs to Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

“Jewfree” guest houses in resort places, etc., provided for the separation of members of Jewish and Christian middle classes and elites.

This happened more or less radically in the church sector of the educational market, especially in its Catholic sector. In the Budapest Piarist gymnasium, earlier (as shown above) with significant Jewish representation among pupils, the share of the latter fell to 3.3% in 1920–29 and a mere 1.4% in 1930–43. But even such a minimal representation of Jews was exceptional in Catholic high schools of the capital city, since in all the other similar institutions—the Rákócziánium (1907), the Cistercian school (1912), and the Benedictine gymnasium (1923)—the total number of Jewish graduates did not exceed altogether 5 (!) up to 1945—a statistically insignificant figure. A similar decline of “assimilationist schooling” cannot be detected in primary education up to the anti-Jewish laws, because the market of primary schools had always been and remained severely segregated denominationally and in a number of rural settlements there was no choice. So kids of the local Jewish diaspora continued in small numbers to attend even the Catholic Church school when there was no other accessible.⁷⁰

Such measures of segregation could serve as a direct precedent for the social seclusion of Jews after the German invasion in March 1944, leading further to their ghettoization and deportation, when all this was not preceded and preempted by their enrollment in forced-labor army units.

4. Early steps toward legal and administrative disenfranchisement and discrimination. There is an abundance of evidence that the system of drastic limitation of the access of Jews to several activity markets, employments, social distinctions, benefits, grants, and customary social arrangements—normally allotted following politically neutral criteria, only on the strength of merit, gift, previously acquired entitlements or preliminary investments—had preceded by two decades the anti-Jewish legislation of the era of Nazi-fication proper.

⁷⁰ On this see my recent studies: “Zsidó-keresztény kapcsolatok a honi elemi iskolai piacon a 20. század első felében. Esettanulmány a felekezetek közötti távolság és közelség történelmi alakulásáról” [Jewish–Christian relations in the Hungarian school market in the first part of the twentieth century: A case study of the changing interdenominational distance and proximity], *Credo, Evangélikus folyóirat* (February 2014): 6–14; “Közelítések a Vészkorszak mérlegéhez az elemi iskolai piacon” [Approaches to the balance sheet of the Shoah in the primary school market], in *Magyar Holokauszt, veszteségek és felelőségek* [Hungarian Holocaust, losses and responsibilities] (Budapest: Logos Kiadó, 2014), 185–202.

The first and obviously major element of this system of anti-Jewish restriction was, of course, the *numerus clausus* law of 1920. It formally set the model for the subsequent anti-Jewish legislation. From the outset it postulated the distinctive nature of Jewry as a “racial group” (*népfa*) as against other ethnic minorities—however imprecise and legally problematic this definition might have been. (So much so, indeed, that the Budapest High Court of Justice annulled it in 1925, stipulating that Jewry was just a religious community.⁷¹) The law deprived approximately three-quarters of Jewish secondary school graduates from their right to pursue higher studies in their home country, reducing their share to 6% of new enrollments in universities and law schools.⁷² This was a decisive blow on the educational and professional mobility of Jews and their progressive integration in upcoming modern middle-class strata, a development accompanying Jewish “assimilation” since the late Enlightenment. (Higher education was opened up to Jews by Joseph II in 1783.) But the very principle of abstract “racial proportionality” (and not merit, certified knowledge or suitability) was contrary to the logic of modern social and economic organizations. When, under heavy pressure from abroad (notably the League of Nations), the Bethlen government in 1928 replaced the regulation enforcing a degree of “racial” proportionality in university enrollments with one that focused on “professional” qualifications.⁷³ This change was as viciously oppressive as its previously “racial” counterpart. If applied, it would have meant that more than half of would-be students ought to be recruited from the peasantry—as against the 6 to 7% commonly registered during the interwar years.⁷⁴ This would have been an untimely application of a properly Communist scheme, duly put into forceful practice later under Stalin’s rule.

The idea of proportionality liable to be employed against Jews in the access to middle-class positions gained ground immediately after the passing of the law. The future prime minister, Gömbös—at that time a

⁷¹ Mária M. Kovács, “The Problem of Continuity,” 27.

⁷² Mária M. Kovács, “The Hungarian Numerus Clausus,” 27–55.

⁷³ Andor Ladányi, “On the 1928 Amendment of the Hungarian Numerus Clausus Law,” in *The Numerus Clausus in Hungary: Studies on the First Anti-Jewish Law and Academic Anti-Semitism in Modern Central Europe*, ed. Victor Karady and Péter Tibor Nagy (Budapest: Pasts Inc., 2012), 69–111.

⁷⁴ Rudolf Andorka, “Az egyetemi és főiskolai hallgatók társadalmi összetétele, 1898–1942” [The social composition of students in universities and academies, 1898–1942], *Statisztikai szemle* (February 1979): 182.

fervent “Awakener” of the movement for “racial defense”—proposed in parliament in February 1920 that the presence of Jews in every professional branch should be restricted to 5%.⁷⁵ The idea of achieving a “social equilibrium” of sorts at the expense of Jews openly inspired most of the legislation in economic and social matters since the earliest—and politically most “moderate”—years of the “Christian Course” regime (1920–28)⁷⁶ until its very end. Was the first openly anti-Jewish Law of 1938/XV not evoking under a cynically neutral title the very idea of “proportionality”?⁷⁷ In this sense, the continuity between both the 1920 and the 1928 versions of the “closed numbers” law and later laws of the Nazification period appears to be manifest.

Other properly anti-Jewish restrictions were more subtly introduced with no less efficiency for those actually concerned. Formally and officially, the 1920 rather partial land reform did not specifically touch Jewish landowners. In practice, the move concerned mostly properties recently purchased, without affecting feudal holdings protected by the *mainmorte* system. Estimations suggest that at least one-quarter of estates distributed to petty peasants had belonged to Jewish proprietors.⁷⁸ The fact is that between 1920 and 1930 the number of big Jewish landowners and tenants was close to be halved, falling to 52% of its former size.⁷⁹

In a more drastic mode, the access of Jews to symbolically prominent elite positions was practically barred after 1919. It concerned all levels of the state bureaucracy, including academia—which was selectively open to Jews in the Dualist era. Thus, henceforth, no university professors of Jewish faith could be appointed. As to recognized scholars of Jewish birth, eight of them still joined the academic staff in the 1920s, under the Bethlen administration. To appoint two of them, Lajos Ádám (surgeon)

⁷⁵ From the Acts of the 1920 National Assembly, cited in Gyurgyák, *A zsidókérdés Magyarországon*, 132.

⁷⁶ Ungváry, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege*, 115.

⁷⁷ “For the more efficacious safeguarding of the balance of social and economic life.” See Róbert Vértess, *Magyarországi zsidótörvények és rendeletek 1938–1945* [Anti-Jewish laws and decrees in Hungary, 1938–1945] (Budapest: Polgár Kiadó, 1997), 19–32.

⁷⁸ Ungváry, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege*, 131–32.

⁷⁹ Between the two censuses the number of Jewish owners over 1,000 holds decreased from 117 to 40, those having 200 to 1,000 holds decreased from 444 to 282, those with 100 to 200 holds decreased from 293 to 16, while the number of Jewish leaseholders above 100 holds declined from 891 to 459 (*Magyar statisztikai közlemények* 72, 315, and *ibid.* 96, 9).

and József Frigyesi (obstetrician), the government had to fight against its own ruling party.⁸⁰ After Bálint Hóman took on the ministry in 1932, such practices ceased to function. No professor of Jewish extraction was appointed until 1945,⁸¹ with possibly one exception, documented in a different source. Dénes König (physicist) was appointed to the staff of the Budapest Polytechnic in 1935.⁸² Moreover, Nándor Mauthner (chemist) became a corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences in 1934.⁸³ These were exceptional cases confirming the rule of the academic exclusion of Jews. No surprise that János Neumann, the mathematician whose unique genius was recognized very early on by his contemporaries, was recommended in vain for election in the Academy of Sciences by no less than eight academicians among his professional peers.⁸⁴

A veritable system of “administrative antisemitism” started to be implemented both at the national and the local level by state authorities. Its fields of application were as diversified as the revocation of permits for movies, the selective grant of tuition waivers and student fellowships in secondary schools (preferentially reserved for the offspring of civil servants) or in local or foreign universities, the exclusion of Jews from opening tobacconist’s shops (offered to war widows), forced early retirement of Jews in civil service positions, or even the prohibition of Jews from opening craftsman’s workshops (a practice apparently initiated by László Endre as head of the district administration in Gödöllő).⁸⁵ An example of the latter was cited for 1922 in the village of Derecske, near the capital city, where the chief judge refused to grant permission for a Jewish entrepreneur to start a business with the following argument: “The request will be refused because in the territory of truncated Hungary the primary task of officials is to guarantee the living conditions of Hungarians. If he granted the request of a member of a different race, a chief judge would be acting against his obligations.”⁸⁶ The production of this type of forceful

⁸⁰ Mária M. Kovács, “Magyarországi zsidó,” 91.

⁸¹ Ibid., 91–92.

⁸² István Hargittai, “Hetvenéves fehér folt” [An empty spot of seventy years], *Magyar tudomány* (September 2013): 1035–45, particularly 1043, <http://www.matud.iif.hu/2013/09/02.htm>.

⁸³ Ibid., 1037.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 1039.

⁸⁵ Ungváry, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege*, 114, 151–56.

⁸⁶ Cited by Attila Pók (following Rolf Fischer) in *The Politics of Hatred in the Middle of Europe: Scapegoating in Twentieth Century Hungary: History and Historiography* (Szombathely: Savaria University Press, 2009), 65–66.

“changes of the guard,” imposed by local administrations, can even be statistically demonstrated via the sharp decrease of the number of “independent” Jewish professionals. Following my calculations, between 1920 and 1930 the countrywide decrease among craftsmen was 25% (17% in Budapest), among traders, shopkeepers and financiers 10% (19% in Budapest), and among those in transportation as much as 32% (50% in Budapest).⁸⁷

Such openly anti-Jewish practices of discrimination just needed to be systematized in the antisemitic legislation after 1938. They were indeed under the aegis of the “change of the guard” program publicly advocated by the right and progressively implemented by the administration. Here again the continuity from the 1920s to the 1940s proved to be all but perfect.

5. *The generalization of state-sponsored forms of symbolic degradation, disqualification and stigmatization of Jews.* The manner in which Jews were negatively identified and treated in Hungarian society was complicated and often involved a degree of ambiguity.

In one major instance the exclusion of Jews from an officially sponsored category of public distinction was implemented at the highest level of state power. In 1920 Admiral Horthy created the Order of Vitéz (*Vitézi Rend*) as a Hungarian order of merit. Its members served as a strictly Christian gentry. This “Order of Gallants” (*vitéz* means “valiant” or “gallant soldier”) recognized military bravery in World War I. It was a hereditary distinction (extending to the first-born son of a “gallant”) entitling members—recruited mostly from men of the peasantry and the lower classes⁸⁸—to add a title to their family name. Gallants were also endowed with a small landed property (the “gallants’ plots”). The assumption was that Jews would not be seriously affected by their exclusion from the “Order of Gallants” since they were assumed to be associated with the White Terror, “a cadre destined to forcefully defend an antidemocratic regime.”⁸⁹

⁸⁷ *Magyar statisztikai közlemények* 72, (1926), 457, 463, 469, and *ibid.* 96, 109, 115, 121. Randolph L. Braham quotes somewhat different figures from another source, but they carry the same meaning in the sense of the change (Braham, 81).

⁸⁸ According to my survey of a 1/10 sample of some 1,300 “gallant” titles granted before 1941, some 42% of the nominees belonged to the peasantry and 16% to the urban lower classes, though the vast majority of “gallants” (83%) lived outside the capital city.

⁸⁹ Miklós Szabó, *Múmiák öröksége, politikai és történelmi esszék* [Heritage of mummies: Political and historical essays] (Budapest: Új Mandátum, 1995), 166–67.

In a much more brutal attack, the two statistical offices (the central one and later that of the capital city)—ostensibly neutral and scholarly state agencies—started to produce data comparing directly Jews to non-Jews in the population. The commentaries alongside the tabular representations of the data were designed to stigmatize Jews and echoed language found in early-twentieth-century antisemitic literature, such as, for example, comments about the Jewish "invasion" (*térfoglalás* = *Raumerob-erung*) of elite occupations, something that was regarded as both unwelcome and illegitimate. In the final synthetic report on the 1910 census data related to professional stratification (published in 1920), such tables and explanations were produced for the first time due to the eminent right-wing statistician, Alajos Kovács.⁹⁰ In the text of the data analysis one encounters a number of contemporary catchphrases typical of the antisemitic discourse. There is a question about "Jews endowed with a particular sense of business": "It is typical that the share of the Jews ... grows in the branches of activity, providing a larger income as well as increased power, authority, and influence"; "In some intellectual professions the role of Jews is even more shocking"; "It is quite appalling with what decisiveness and how rapidly the invasion of the professional space of lawyers by Jews has been carried out in the whole territory." The same renowned specialist of population studies was the author of the first comprehensive statistical report on Jews in the state, *Jewry's Expansion in Hungary*.⁹¹ It was full of politically committed anti-Jewish statements, similar to the above-cited ones. Significantly enough, the study appeared only in a private edition published by the author, due perhaps to its unusually biased scholarly language. Despite Kovács's antisemitic views, he was appointed director of the Central Statistical Office in 1924, a development that must be considered as significant for this "period of consolidation" (reputed to have brought about a lull in anti-Jewish activism).

Anti-Jewish messages were also present in the only comprehensive historical and statistical study of the Jewish presence in Hungary that was published in the interwar years besides the two books by Kovács in an authoritative scholarly journal that had only recently been founded (in

⁹⁰ *Magyar statisztikai közlemények* 64, (1924), 204–8 and 278–81.

⁹¹ *A zsidóság térfoglalása Magyarországon* [Jewry's expansion in Hungary] (Budapest, 1922). His later book on Jews was published in preparation of the first anti-Jewish Law: *A csonkamagyarországi zsidóság a statisztika tükrében* [The Jews of the Hungarian rump state in the light of statistics] (Budapest: Egyesült Keresztény Magyar Liga, 1938).

1923) in statistical studies.⁹² The author of the study was Artur Benisch, a recognized expert in the field. This highly scholarly enterprise epitomizes the primary stereotypical formulations of the Judeophobic discourse of the interwar decades as exemplified in its use of the following phrases: “Jewish flood,” “they invade” some counties, “quantitative conquest of space,” “He observed with apprehension ... the speedy multiplication of uncultured Galician Jews who suck the blood of the people,” “the danger of Eastern Jews,” “they pursue their flowing down,” “After Trianon they quickly left the positions in decay just to occupy the new ones,” “hopefully this Galician extension will be soon absorbed,” “one cannot regard as beneficial for Hungarians the replacement of overpopulous Eastern Jews with overcultured Western ones.”

Besides Kovács or Benisch, other experts tended to adapt their statistical studies to the mood of the era. Some did it with outspokenly anti-Jewish fervor, like Mátyás Matolcsy, a specialist of data on national income and wealth, as well as its repartition among various social layers, particularly between Jews and non-Jews.⁹³ Others did the same later on and not without a dose of ambiguity. This applied to the not less gifted head of the Budapest Statistical Office, Lajos I. Illyefalvy. He was a strange, ambivalent personality, a Freemason cultivating good relationships with government officials and rightist politicians (like László Endre), but also with liberal, Jewish or even leftist ones (like the Szakasits brothers).⁹⁴ This did not prevent him from producing in the late 1930s binary data sets based on the Jewish–Christian division, practically in the same vein if not always with similarly antisemitic commentaries (as has been initi-

⁹² “A zsidóság térfoglalása és elhelyezkedése a mai Magyarországon (1830–1930)” [The conquest of space—invasion—by the Jews and their settlement in today’s Hungary, 1830–1930], *Magyar Statisztikai Szemle* (November 1934): 916–25.

⁹³ See his studies: “Minket a zsidó földek igénybevételénél is egyedül az érdekel, hogy a magyarságot minél jobban megerősítsük” [We are interested in the expropriation of Jewish-owned lands only in order to strengthen Magyardom], *Magyarság útja*, June 5, 1938; *Jövedelemeloszlás Magyarországon* [The distribution of income in Hungary] (Budapest: Légrády Nyomda, 1936); with István Varga, *Magyarország nemzeti jövedelme 1924/25–1934/35* [The national income of Hungary, 1924/25–1934/35] (Budapest: Magyar Gazdaságkutató Intézet, 1936).

⁹⁴ Zsombor Bódy, “A női munka felszabadítása vagy korlátozása” [Liberation or limitation of women’s work], in *Határtalan nők. Kizártak és befogadottak a női társadalomban* [Women without frontiers: Those excluded from or integrated into the society of women], ed. Boglárka Bakó and Zsófia Eszter Tóth (Budapest: Nyitott könyvműhely, 2008), 93–112, particularly 103.

ated by Kovács).⁹⁵ The general secretary of his institution was an exceptionally open-minded Catholic lady scholar, Olga Molnár,⁹⁶ to whom we owe the first-ever serious statistical studies on women and their economic activity in contemporary Hungary.⁹⁷ Paradoxically enough, with the benefit of hindsight, these publications can still be regarded as among the best ever produced, shedding light on, among other things, the situation of Jews in a modern European nation-state before the Shoah—and doing so independently, as can be judged from the occasionally implicit message highlighting the negative treatment of Jews by the rank-and-file Christian population.

Throughout these publications one can observe a process that started in the early years of the "Christian Course," was pursued during the whole period, and finally achieved its paroxysmal final stage during the years of the anti-Jewish laws.

A quite similar observation applied to other forms of the symbolic stigmatization of Jews, which were carried out most efficiently and in even more practical terms by the limitation of their "assimilationist agency" or by the withdrawal of their means to profess national commitment and assume an "autochthonous" public image. Such an "antiassimilationist drive" can be easily identified in the movement of surname Magyarizations, depending on the authorization awarded by the Ministry of Interior to switch foreign-sounding surnames for Magyar ones. It was mentioned above that Jews had been in the vanguard, representing the absolute majority of the Magyarization movement in the outgoing decades of the

⁹⁵ I have found no evidence for his publishing binary data before the anti-Jewish laws. Most of that kind of work appeared by the way in a confidential series of studies emanating from the Budapest Statistical Bureau in the so-called *Statisztikai értesítő* (*Budapest Székesfőváros statisztikai havifüzeteinek melléklete*). See among others: "Az általános kereseti adóval megrótt egyének száma és jövedelme a székesfővárosban" [The number and income of those taxable for general professional income in the capital], February 1939; "A vagyonadóval megrótt egyének száma és vagyona a fővárosban" [The number and the wealth of those whose properties are taxable in the capital], March 1939; "A jövedelemadóval megrótt egyének száma és jövedelme a székesfővárosban" [The number and income of those taxable for their personal income in the capital], April 1939.

⁹⁶ Bódy, "A női munka felszabadítása vagy korlátozása," 102–11.

⁹⁷ See her seminal studies: Olga Molnár, *A női munkaerő számának alakulása a székesfővárosban* [The evolution of the female work force in the residential capital city] (Budapest: Székesfőváros Statisztikai Hivatala, 1935); *Munkanélküliek a szellemi pályákon alkalmazott nők körében* [Unemployment among women in intellectual professions] (Budapest: Statisztikai Közlemények, 1938).

Dualist era. After 1919 their requests to this effect were not systematically rejected but discouraged. They could submit such demands, but they had to face frequent refusals and prolonged delays to gain satisfaction. This was truer in the first period of the “Christian Course” than later until 1938. Thus, their share among the authorizations granted bottomed out at a mere 1.4% in the 1920s and did not apparently exceed 10% in later years (except in 1936 with 15%), that is, even after 1933, when the government embarked upon a campaign—following a ministerial decree—to stimulate (often force) civil servants and all those performing economic or other functions in public to adopt Magyar surnames. No such requests by Jews were satisfied after the adoption of the first anti-Jewish law in 1938.⁹⁸ But when rejection did not seem to be the issue, delays for the authorization asked for could be incomparably longer for Jewish than for Christian petitioners. The vast majority of Christian demands (65%) were satisfied within a month as against only 5% of those by Jews and 33% of those handed in by Christians of Jewish birth. Indeed the settlement of requests lasted more than a year for most Jews (66%), while it took so long with exceptional rarity (0.8%) for Christians.⁹⁹ Such obviously discriminative treatment afflicting Jews was a telling example of how “Christian Course” governments restricted first and finally forcefully blocked this historically important movement of Jewish integration in Hungarian society.

Continuities in discrimination against Jews and their stigmatization could be thus established via a vast array of extremely diversified indicators since the late nineteenth century and in an intensified and partially different pattern after the 1919 rupture. The meaning of the 1919 crisis was essentially that while public powers had been relatively neutral or even favorable to Jews in matters of relevant public controversy or tension, hereafter the ruling elites of the “Christian Course” tended with ups and downs to pursue anti-Jewish policies leading to and culminating in the anti-Jewish legislation starting in 1938. Continuities as demonstrated here suggest that the transformation of Jews into second-rate citizens constituted the very process of historical preparation of the Shoah and—indeed—its condition of possibility.

⁹⁸ Victor Karady and István Kozma, *Név és nemzet: családnév-változtatás, névpolitika és nemzetiségi erőviszonyok Magyarországon a feudalizmustól a kommunizmusig* [Name and nation. Family name changes, name policy and ethnic minority balance of forces in Hungary from the feudalistic ages to the socialistic era] (Budapest: Osiris, 2002), 239.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 243. Data for 1933.

III.
THE AGE OF
PERSECUTION

The Origins of the Military Labor Service System in Hungary

László Csősz

Introduction

The Hungarian institution of *military labor service* inflicted on Jews and members of various other minority groups is one of the well-documented chapters of World War II and the Holocaust. Scholarly literature describe the military labor service system in Hungary as a unique phenomenon, arguing that whereas most of the Axis countries excluded Jews from their armies, the Hungarian authorities compelled them to perform unarmed military service and sent many of them to the frontline alongside combat units. The majority of these labor servicemen were Jewish. At least 50,000 Jewish men died as members of the Hungarian forces, comprising about one-fifth of the total casualties of the Royal Hungarian Army between 1941 and 1945. Labor servicemen comprised approximately 10 percent of the estimated half a million victims of the Holocaust in Hungary. These facts rendered the problem of labor service to be interpreted exclusively within the realms of military history and Holocaust studies. However, this complex historical problem has several ramifications that might capture the minds of nationalism scholars as well.

The discipline of Holocaust studies has witnessed several methodological and theoretical revolutions and has attracted ever-growing scholarly interest in the last few decades. Considering this fact, it is striking that the early groundbreaking accounts about the Hungarian labor service system are still the standard reference works of the problem. Elek Karsai's source volumes and Randolph L. Braham's comprehensive monograph thoroughly describe the creation and administration of the system and its

turning points during the course of the war.¹ Since the publication of these pioneering works, several scholars have authored outlines on the topic or addressed specific aspects of the problem. Most of them trained their lenses on the most murderous periods: the fate of the labor servicemen deployed on the Eastern front and working under German command in the copper mines of Serbia and along the eastern border of the Nazi empire.² Several original publications notwithstanding, Hungarian scholarship on labor service has largely failed to *develop or rethink the interpretative framework* of the early scholars in the area. No significant attempt to author a comparative study facilitating the extensive international literature on forced labor and labor service exists. Moreover, despite the rich

¹ This article was produced during the author's tenure as a Tziporah Wiesel Fellow at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The author offers special thanks to dr. Steven F. Sage and dr. Attila Gidó. Elek Karsai, „Fegyvertelen álltak az aknamezőkön”: *Dokumentumok a munkaszolgálat történetéhez Magyarországon I-II* [„Unarmed They Stood on the Minefields.” Documents on the History of Labor Service in Hungary I-II] (Budapest, MIOK, 1962); Randolph L. Braham, *The Hungarian Labor Service System, 1939–1945* (Boulder, CO: East European Quarterly, 1977). The first scholarly attempt at documenting labor service dates back to as early as 1946: Jenő Lévai, *Fekete könyv a magyar zsidóság szenvedéseiről* (Budapest: Officina, 1946; English edition: *Black Book on the Martyrdom of Hungarian Jewry* [Vienna: Central European Times-Panorama, 1948]).

² See, for example, the overviews by Péter Hanák, Szabolcs Szita and Krisztián Ungváry in *The Holocaust in Hungary: Fifty Years Later*, ed. Randolph L. Braham and Attila Pók (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 329–57; *Had-történelmi Közlemények* 3 (2004), 817–857; *A magyar honvédség a második világháborúban* [The Hungarian Armed Forces in World War II] (Budapest: Osiris, 2005), 116–22; and the monographic studies by Szabolcs Szita (*Halálerőd: A munkaszolgálat és a hadimunka történetéhez, 1944–1945* [Death Fortress. On the History of Labor Service and Wartime Labor, 1944–1945] [Budapest: Kossuth, 1989]), Tamás Csapody (*Labor Servicemen in Bor* [Budapest: Vince, 2012], both in Hungarian), Eleonore Lappin-Eppel (*Ungarisch-jüdische Zwangsarbeiter und Zwangsarbeiterinnen in Österreich 1944/45* [Wien: Lit, 2010]), and most recently, Robert Rozett (*Conscripted Slaves: Hungarian Jewish Forced Laborers on the Eastern Front during the Second World War* [Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2014]) and a number of research notes and source publications in various scholarly journals. Very few of these publications appeared in English. One remarkable exception is the study by Judit Pihurik who analyzed wartime diaries of Hungarian officers, focusing on their views about the “Jewish Question” (“Hungarian Soldiers and Jews on the Eastern Front, 1941–1943,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 35.3 (2007): 71–102). Name lists of the fallen soldiers and labor servicemen were published in the memorial album edited by János Bús and Péter Szabó (*Béke poraikra... 1-2* [May They Rest in Peace... 1–2] [Budapest: Varietas, 1999–2001]).

historiography, a number of primary sources remain basically unexplored and a number of issues have not yet received analytical attention.

Despite certain noteworthy peculiarities, the Hungarian institution of labor service was embedded in and heavily influenced by international trends. Still, there have been only scarce attempts to *compare the Hungarian case with the policies of other countries*. During and before WWII, several countries in Hitler's Europe compelled various social groups to undertake forced labor or unarmed military service on a discriminatory basis. The cases of the two other "opportunistic satellites," as Raul Hilberg aptly called them, Bulgaria and Romania, are of particular significance to understand the Hungarian system. The political, economic, and social milieu that formulated the policy against various minority groups—and therefore determined the evolution of the concepts of labor service—followed roughly the same patterns. Of course, one can cite considerable differences, and numerous shifts in aims and motivations over the course of the war, but these country-specific differences seem to be outweighed by parallels. In other words, the systems with different structural, management and operational schemes served analogous political, economic, and social functions.

Exploring the origins of the wartime military labor service system, it is essential to place this problem in the *broader context of the labor service phenomenon*. Originating from nineteenth-century altruistic conceptions of voluntary work in the service of public good, the idea of youth labor camps developed into a sociopolitical concept, a social movement and a measure of crisis management after World War I. In the authoritarian regimes of Eastern Europe, state-supported voluntary labor service projects developed into militarized and ideological constructions and the instruments of social engineering. State policies about civilian labor service played a role in the evolution of the discriminatory forms of military service before and during WWII.

Scholars scrutinizing wartime military labor service systems can learn much about the *ethno-political concepts of nation-states* and national communities that created them. The discriminatory practices within the army betray the altering views of local military and political elites on ethnic community and loyalty to the nation. On the verge of entering the war, all Axis states but Finland excluded Jews from their armies. Furthermore, this measure was applied to all elements of society considered dangerous from a national security perspective. Minority groups living on borderlands or in historically disputed territories were the primary targets of this policy. However, the nationalistic regimes did not want to leave these groups

out of the war effort, either. Various forms of unarmed service and forced labor emerged, with complex political, economic, and ideological motivations altering over the course of war.

Concepts of military labor service were influenced by the agendas and aspirations of nationalistic political elites about ethnically and racially *homogenous nation-states* and changing *perceptions of belonging to the national community*. The duty and privilege of every able-bodied man to defend his homeland with arms was one of the fundamental criteria of the modern nation-state. Universal conscription symbolized belonging to the political and national community. Hence, depriving certain social groups of the right to carry arms was one of the first and fundamental steps to degrade them to secondary citizens. Besides social and political *disfranchisement*, drafting suspect social groups into unarmed service can be also interpreted as a *preventive safety measure*. The call-up and separation of able-bodied men renders the targeted social group powerless, blocking their access to weapons, which they could potentially turn against the state and the dominant ethnic group. Moreover, revoking the right to carry arms was a form of *humiliation and a reprisal* for alleged acts of treachery and disloyalty in the past.

Naturally, perceptions and theories of labor service should be interpreted in the framework of the anti-Jewish policies of the pro-Axis governments. There was a *complex interplay* between the advocates of *racist and nationalistic exclusionism in the army* (and in the civilian labor service movement) and *state policies* about definition of a particular minority group, deprivation of their rights, and their gradual exclusion from society. Arbitrary measures of the military authorities (especially in the Romanian and Hungarian cases) often preceded and exceeded national antisemitic legislation and therefore served as catalysts of government policies. At the same time, the fundamentally *pragmatic and economic motives* of the anti-Jewish laws determined the development of labor service systems: these institutions also served as a mean of economic exploitation and expropriation, both on the state and the individual level. In addition, the masses of young men who lost their jobs due to Jewish laws posed a safety risk for the anti-semitic state, but also an *unemployment problem*, to which underpaid or free labor service offered a cheap solution.

It should be added that by the time the labor service systems crystallized and were legally established (1941–42), the utmost objective of all the pro-Axis regimes under scrutiny was to expel Jews (and other “enemies”) from the country and nationalize their assets. Therefore, labor service was seen by most of the decision-makers as a *transient measure*.

The evolution of the labor service systems also *reflected the changes of the external political environment*, most of all the twists and turns of the Eastern allies' troubled relationship with Nazi Germany. The decisions concerning the military service of the Jews before the outbreak of the war were partly the products of domestic developments and partly the concomitants of the German military and political alliance. Due to the different dynamics of anti-Jewish exclusionism (attributed to the different socioeconomic character and size of the Jewish community) in Bulgaria, direct German involvement played a greater role. Their Hungarian and Romanian counterparts, by contrast, mostly pursued their internally developed anti-Jewish agenda, albeit influenced by Nazi successes. After 1942–43, the changing attitude to the German alliance and the outcome of the war was the decisive factor formulating policies concerning labor service.

Concepts of Civilian Labor Service

Labor service was a widely used socioeconomic practice in the interwar Europe and United States to ease socioeconomic crises. Based on the economic and social theories of nineteenth-century political thinkers and writers, it developed into a mass movement after World War I, involving millions of young people. Its primary aim was to reduce unemployment and the risks of social stability and security involved, while offering labor force for state-run infrastructural and conservation projects. Besides, it facilitated physical and ideological training and education of the youth. The latter factor became increasingly dominant in the authoritarian regimes in Southern, Central and Eastern Europe. For the losers of World War I, for whom the regulations of the Versailles peace treaties banned conscription, this objective was of special importance.³

In postwar western Europe, the first attempts at organizing voluntary work camps were based on a prewar idea that considered labor service as a pacifist replacement of military service. These altruistic initiatives soon gave way to more pragmatic, state-sponsored projects, focusing on the economic function of labor service. The labor service idea gained momentum in the years of the Great Depression. About two dozen coun-

³ On the precursors to the concepts of labor service and their typology, see Kiran Klaus Patel, *Soldiers of Labor: Labor Service in Nazi Germany and New Deal America, 1933–1945* (Washington, DC: German Historical Institute, 2005), 22–32.

tries established youth labor camps, seeking a Keynesian-style remedy to the socioeconomic crisis. The largest and most developed network was operated by the American Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) between 1933 and 1942. Albeit the popularity and success of the work camps in Bulgaria and Germany influenced their Western counterparts, there remained fundamental differences. In democratic societies economic efficiency and vocational training always had a priority over ideological indoctrination and military-like drill. Private and grassroots initiatives played an important role, whereas in the eastern part of Europe labor service systems were dominated by the (authoritarian) state. The latter became increasingly ideological and militarized, ultimately serving the sole purpose of preparation for war.

The first mandatory labor service system was established in Bulgaria in June 1920 by Stamboliyski's Agrarian Union.⁴ It was the only state-sponsored system introduced by the political Left. Postwar Bulgaria was balancing on the edge of economic collapse and political chaos. The system was therefore not only intended to improve the economic situation, but also to distract young people from the Communist movement and to prevent political violence. Furthermore, labor camps fit into the conception of the radical peasant party about collective work. The declared aim of the project was, as Stamboliyski put it, to replace a military army "with a labor army developing the idea of brotherhood and solidarity of social classes and producing materially useful and tangible results for the country."⁵ The Bulgarian system did not have a discriminatory character at its inception. However, the agrarians' sharp anticapitalist and antiurban sentiments as well as the glorification of physical labor had

⁴ All men and women reaching the age of twenty were compelled to serve one year in labor camps. Following a protest from Allied powers, in 1921 the service was reduced to eight months and people were allowed to buy exemptions by paying a tax. Each year an average of 20,000 young men were enrolled in the system. Initially, the laws prescribed labor service for women as well, but this was canceled in 1923, due to economic motivations, but also to the opposition of traditionalist segments of society. On the Bulgarian labor service system, see Kenneth Holland, *Youth in European Labor Camps: A Report to the American Youth Commission* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1939), 39–50 and 244–46; Max Lazard, *Compulsory Labor Service in Bulgaria*, Studies and Reports, series B, no. 12 (Geneva: International Labor Office, 1922).

⁵ Holland, *Youth in European Labor Camps*, 42.

parallels with right-wing concepts developing in other Eastern European countries.⁶

The other model which had decisive impact on labor service systems in Eastern and Southern Europe was that of Germany. The idea of a centralized, mandatory youth work service under (authoritative) ideological control was nursed by militaristic-nationalistic *völkisch* circles in the early 1920s. However, their proposals at that time were turned down by decision-makers.⁷ At the same time, different concepts of labor service emerged. Student camps organized in the 1920s were characterized by political diversity. Many of them nursed leftist, pacifist, and egalitarian ideals. Still, the concept of a state-run compulsory labor service prevailed as a demand of the antirepublican right. The introduction of the *Freiwilliger Arbeitsdienst* in 1931 can be interpreted as a concession to the emerging National Socialists, following their electoral success in 1930, even though the government considered it chiefly as a method to provide the unemployed with occupation and therefore solving the crisis by economic means.⁸

The emerging Nazi movement regarded the voluntary camps as hotbeds for leftist ideas, but it understood the ideological potential of the system. Therefore, they began organizing their parallel network of camps, under the auspices of veterans' organizations and ultranationalist student unions. Following Hitler's takeover, all camps were promptly united under Nazi control. Labor service was declared compulsory in May 1935. One month later, the universal labor service institution, the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (RAD), was introduced for both sexes of German youth. From 1933 several groups of "internal aliens" had been excluded from the system. Their ranks included Jews, spouses of Jews, political enemies, and various minority groups considered "unreliable." Roma and Sinti fell into this category, as well as minorities living in disputed territories, such as Poles, but even the Danes and the Walloons, who were regarded as racially superior in Nazi hierarchy. The RAD's primary objective was the indoctrination of the National Socialist worldview, including the idea of Nazi *Volksgemein-*

⁶ Following a protest from Allied powers, in 1921 the service was reduced to eight months and people were allowed to buy exemptions by paying a tax. Each year an average of 20,000 young men were enrolled in the system. For further details, see Holland, *Youth in European Labor Camps*, 39–50.

⁷ See, for example, Konstantin Hierl's memorandum to Chief of Staff Hans von Seeckt (Patel, *Soldiers of Labor*, 51–53).

⁸ Patel, *Soldiers of Labor*, 41–44.

schaft and the “true conception of labor.” Besides, physical premilitary training also played a role: the six-month labor service was a requirement of military training (and ultimately for university enrollment). RAD was an instrument of total mobilization for a future war.⁹ As the American educator Kenneth Holland put it two years before the outbreak of the war: “[G]eneration and generation of youth cannot be subjected to the remarkably efficient propaganda program of the Third Reich and trained to fight without making a national or international conflict well-nigh inevitable.”¹⁰

The German decision influenced other countries in Eastern and Southern Europe to introduce mandatory labor service in the following years. However, these were preceded by several attempts to create militarized and centralized community labor projects from the early postwar years onwards. Both in Hungary and Romania these initiatives were spearheaded by extreme right-wing youth organizations. Hence, Jews were *de facto* excluded from these projects, albeit initially not by law. Though influenced by European examples, these were genuinely domestic initiatives. In Hungary, ultranationalist student unions put forward the idea of militarized university labor battalions in 1921. Their members were predominantly middle class, including many refugees from the lost territories. Having military experience and being the only reliable reserve force, they became important politically as well.¹¹ However, the government, pursuing the aim of political consolidation, favored more moderate (and statist) solutions: they established the corporative-style National Labor Safety Organization (Nemzeti Munkavédelmi Szervezet). This organization aimed at mobilizing politically loyal conservative Christian middle classes on a voluntary basis against “destabilizing” efforts, such as strikes, by left-wing movements and the trade unions.¹²

The idea of labor camps was raised again at the beginning of the thirties, as a response to the economic crisis that struck agriculture par-

⁹ On the development of the labor service system in Germany, see Patel, *Soldiers of Labor*, chaps. 2–3; Sándor Kerekes, *A német birodalmi munkaszolgálat* [The German Imperial Labor Service] (Kecskemét: Első Kecskeméti Hírlapkiadó és Ny., 1938); Holland, *Youth in European Labor Camps*, 70–129.

¹⁰ Holland, *Youth in European Labor Camps*, 161.

¹¹ Andor Ladányi, *Az egyetemi ifjúság az ellenforradalom első éveiben (1919–1921)* [University Youth in the First Years of the Counterrevolution, 1919–1921] (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1979).

¹² László Soós, “A Nemzeti Munkavédelmi Szervezet létrehozása és tevékenységének első évei,” [The Establishment and First Years of the National Labor Safety Organization] *Levéltári Szemle* 29.1–2 (1979): 277–91.

ticularly hard and skyrocketed youth and intellectual unemployment. Even though the Hungarian labor camp movement was spearheaded by militaristic and irredentist student unions, it was also influenced by Western examples and initially was characterized by conceptual diversity. For example, youth labor camps were also organized by intellectuals close to the so-called folk movement (*népi mozgalom*).¹³ However, these initiatives were soon replaced by state-sponsored and centralized projects. The system of camps was eventually incorporated into Hungary's rearmament program.

The race-protectionist student union Turul petitioned the government from 1931 onwards to gain state financial support for their labor service projects. The favorable responses were granted by the fact that Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös (1932–36) and other key decision-makers were members or supporters of Turul. They also realized the propagandistic potential of backing the camps. The union organized its first university labor camp (on a voluntary basis) in 1935. Following the example of the Nazi RAD (the Hungarian term *munkaszolgálat* was actually a loan translation of *Arbeitsdienst*), these camps were placed under state control by the end of the 1930s.

The first attempt to introduce state-organized mandatory, militarized labor service was made by Minister of the Interior (and media expert) Miklós Kozma. He followed the implementation and progress of RAD with great admiration. One of the primary objectives of his visit to Berlin in December 1936 was to study the Nazi labor service system. In his diaries he devoted a lengthy passage to RAD, especially on its ideological and political aspects. The enthusiastic Kozma, when interviewed by the German Telegraphic Agency while in Berlin, expressed his intention to introduce a similar system in Hungary. His words provoked a scandal, which proves that Hungarian political and public life was far

¹³ Ákos Bartha, "Magyarország első nemzeti munkatábora: A sárospataki diákok útépítése" [The First National Labor Camp in Hungary: Road Building of the Students in Sárospatak] *Sárospataki Füzetek* 4 (2010), 59–79. With their radicalism, antiurban stance, and ultimate concern for the villagers and the peasantry (whom they considered to be less contaminated by alien elements, and therefore the quintessence of the Hungarian nation), the folk movement was similar to the German "*völkisch*" ideology and the ideas of the Romanian Iron Guard. However, its racist elements were less prominent, although most of them did not oppose anticapitalist forms of antisemitism (János Gyurgyák, *A zsidókérdés Magyarországon* [The Jewish Question in Hungary] [Budapest: Osiris, 2001], 554–80).

from united in following Nazi initiatives. Prime Minister Kálmán Darányi hastily issued a communiqué stating that the government did not embrace Kozma's view. The proposal was strictly criticized by liberal and leftist journals, as well as the progovernment press.¹⁴

However, as a sign of the radical changes occurring in the political climate, Kozma's idea became reality two years later. In 1937, voluntary labor service was officially introduced by Minister of Religion and Education Bálint Hóman. The camps were put under the jurisdiction of his ministry. The law stipulated that only the members of the right-wing student unions could be accepted into the camps, and that training in the "nationalistic spirit" was one of their primary objectives.¹⁵ Membership of Turul was granted only for those who could prove their non-Jewish descent to the level of great-grandparents. Therefore, youth of Jewish origin were *de facto* excluded from the system long before such exclusion was sanctioned by law. The government considered youth camps a means of education which would convert the "heterogeneous" Hungarian youth into a homogeneous one. Besides, they saw it as a potentially profitable economic project and also a form of military pretraining that could provide a reserve for the regular army.¹⁶ As a result of rapid militarization, voluntary labor camps became increasingly centralized and ultimately merged into the mandatory labor service system under the control of the Ministry of Defense introduced in February 1939 by the Act II of 1939.¹⁷

Turul's efforts to introduce universal national labor service for the training of young people "in military spirit" was closely interwoven with its antisemitic agenda. In March 1938, it demanded that Jews be declared a "racial minority," that there be a ban on mixed marriages, and that a

¹⁴ Hungarian Telegraphic Agency Papers of Miklós Kozma. Hungarian National Archives (MNL OL) K 429 Fasc. 8. Collection of Data, 1936. Vol. IV. (newspaper clippings), Miklós Kozma, "Miniszteri látogatásom Berlinben. 1936. december 9–17" [My Ministerial Visit to Berlin, December 9–17, 1936] (manuscript), 23–29.

¹⁵ Minister of Religion and Education's Decree no. 4.400/1937 on the organization of voluntary national labor camps of students, April 28, 1937. *Magyarországi Rendeletek Tára* (Budapest: Belügyminisztérium, 1937), 468–70.

¹⁶ Protocols of the meeting of the Council of Ministers, December 18, 1938, No. 7. MNL OL K 27.

¹⁷ For further details on the history of university student labor camps, see András Szécsényi, *Egyetemi munkaszolgálat Magyarországon, különös tekintettel a Turul Szövetség tevékenységére* [University Labor Service in Hungary, with Special Emphasis on the Activities of Turul] (PhD dissertation, Budapest: ELTE, 2014).

numerus clausus be established.¹⁸ Other right-wing social organizations—for example, the leading student union (National Association of Hungarian Students [MEFHOSZ])—also actively participated in the preparations of the national defense act. For example, they demanded that “people of the Jewish race” should not be promoted and that Jewish reservists should be drafted without a rank.¹⁹ Proposals did not yet explicitly include the segregated form of labor service for Jews, but the references to “unified Christian-national outlook” and “sense of racial community” projected this final aim. The creators of the national defense act, however, did not include any anti-Jewish passages, despite the pressure from right-wing organizations. The legal department of the Ministry of Defense turned down the proposals, arguing that the new Jewish law would offer a universal “solution to the Jewish question” in the army as well. The first meetings on the implementation of the national defense act, held at the Ministry of Defense in March 1939, emphasized that the primary aim of the system would be to provide the national economy with a workforce: unskilled laborers in infrastructural projects and skilled workers in factories.²⁰

In Romania, the first voluntary work camps were initiated by another emblematic extreme right-wing movement, the Iron Guard, in the mid-1930s. Compulsory labor service was introduced in 1937. The law on public interest labor service stipulated that all men between 18 and 21 (subjected to premilitary training from 1934) had to perform communal work for two months each year. Another law of 1933 allowed the state to extend the system to the total population in case of war. The patriotic work of the mobilized youth was to be coordinated by the state-run paramilitary organization, the Straja Țării (Guards of the Fatherland).²¹ In

¹⁸ Turul program, published in Róbert Kerepeszky, *A Turul Szövetség országos és debreceni szervezete* [The Organization of the Turul Alliance Nationwide and in Debrecen, 1919–1945] (1919–1945) (PhD dissertation, Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetem, 2009), 46.

¹⁹ MEFHOSZ’s memo to the prime minister and the Defense Committee of the parliament, December 16, 1938, Archives of Military History (HL), I 31 Reel 3.

²⁰ Records of Department 1/a. of the Ministry of Defense, HL I 31 Reel 1.

²¹ *Monitorul Oficial al României*, April 27, 1933, 96., 2942; May 11, 1934, 107., 2919–2922; March 24, 1937, 69., 2934–2937; May 15, 1939, 110., 3148–3149. For a more detailed description of the beginnings of the Romanian labor service system, see László Csősz and Attila Gidó, “Excluși și exploatați. Munca obligatorie a evreilor din România și Ungaria în timpul celui de-al Doilea Război Mondial,” [Excluded and Exploited. Labor Service of Jews in Romania and Hungary during World War II] *Working Papers in Romanian Minority Studies* Nr. 48 (Cluj: Research Institute of National Minorities, 2013).

Hungary, the Levente organization, established in 1921, served the same purpose and became mandatory for all boys between 12 and 21 in 1939.²² Romanian Jews performed *public interest* (civilian) labor service along with non-Jewish youth until July 1942. However, from the end of 1940 a law was enacted to regulate the labor service of Jews, so the two systems actually overlapped. Like in Hungary, the (illegal) discriminatory practice was retroactively ratified. Decree Law No. 2068 in July 1942 declared the service of Jews to be “compulsory labor service” in order to distinguish it from the “patriotic communal work” performed by the ethnic Romanian youth.²³

Initially, none of the labor service projects developing in Central and Southeast European countries had an openly discriminatory nature. Until the mid-1930s, labor service initiatives refrained from discrimination, due to the regulations of the Versailles peace treaties. In Bulgaria, for example, authorities responding to Entente criticism about the militarized and nationalistic nature of the system emphasized that Jews and the members of national minorities enthusiastically participated in the labor service program.²⁴ However, due to the dominantly ethnocentric approaches, some minorities were *de facto* excluded from these movements at the very beginning. The Romanian and Hungarian labor service laws of 1937 and 1939 were not explicitly antiminority, but had wide-range discriminatory dimensions.

Perceptions of Loyalty: Jews in the Army

The other formative factor of the labor service systems was the long-lasting tradition of anti-Jewish exclusionism in the military. As elsewhere, military service was one of the key social integration factors of the Jews in Hungary. Jewish soldiers have been serving in the armies of the Habsburg Empire since the end of the eighteenth century. As a sign of patriotism and the support of the liberal program of revolutionary Hungarian elites, thousands of Jews volunteered in the Hungarian *honvéd* army in the Indepen-

²² Act II of 1939, 6–13. §. Jews were legally excluded from the Levente organization in 1942. Before that, the institution was often the scene of harassment and humiliation of Jewish youth, as the trainers were ex-servicemen typically holding nationalistic and antisemitic sentiments.

²³ Csósz and Gidó, *Munca obligatorie a evreilor din România și Ungaria*, 7.

²⁴ Lazard, *Compulsory Labor Service in Bulgaria*, 157–58.

dence War of 1848–49. In the liberal Austro-Hungarian era, compared to other European countries, Jews had better opportunities to pursue a military career.²⁵ Jews were significantly overrepresented in the reserve officer staff of the Austro-Hungarian army.²⁶ Nonetheless, the professional army always remained the realm of the traditional (noble) elites, Jews constituting less than 1 percent. For a top military career, conversion and assimilation was a requirement and anti-Jewish (and antiminority) sentiments never ceased to exist.

Antisemitism gained momentum after the outbreak of WWI. Defeats of the Austro-Hungarian army in the summer and autumn of 1914 lead to a hysteria seeking spies, saboteurs, and other agents of the enemy among minority groups. Instead of facing the real problems (poor military leadership and logistics and the unpreparedness for modern warfare), officers tended to blame alleged internal enemies for failures. It led to mass arrests, executions, and the internment of thousands charged with pro-Russian and pro-Serbian sympathies. On the other side of the border, the Russian authorities boosted a campaign that had similar roots, but differed in scale and nature: instead of targeting certain groups, Russian Army launched a large-scale campaign of ethnic cleansing and forced migration targeting hundreds of thousands of Germans, Jews, and other minorities considered the enemies of the empire. A bloody wave of pogroms swept along the borderlands.²⁷

As a result, thousands of refugees arrived in Hungary as well, adding an extra impetus to antisemitism in the war-ridden hinterland. Just

²⁵ Twenty-five of them were promoted to the rank of general. One of them was Baron Samu Hazai, who served as minister of defense between 1910 and 1917. His life symbolized the rise and fall of Hungarian Jews within a short historical period: born Samuel Kohn in 1851 as a second-rate citizen, he converted to Catholicism in 1876, changed his name and pursued an exceptional military career. At the end of his long life, in 1942, he was deprived of his rank and saw his grandson drafted in the unarmed labor service.

²⁶ In Russia and Germany, the army staff of officers did not admit Jews at all, whereas in England and France they were admitted to a small degree. By contrast, in the joint army of the Monarchy, the proportion of Jewish officers was 18.7 percent. This number was even higher in the Hungarian army. See István Deák, *Volt egyszer egy tisztikar. A Habsburg-monarchia katonatisztjeinek társadalmi és politikai története, 1848–1918* [There Was Once an Officer Corps. The Social and Political History of the Habsburg Monarchy Officers, 1848–1918] (Budapest: Gondolat, 1993), 219.

²⁷ Alexander Victor Prusin, *The Lands between: Conflict in the East European Borderlands, 1870–1992* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 42–59.

like in Germany, these “*Ostjuden*” became the central targets of hatred. However, Hungarian Jews also faced several accusations, including that of profiteering, defeatism, and avoiding military service. Antisemites argued that Jews, who they thought largely avoided endangering their lives in the service of the nation, suffered fewer casualties than Christians did. Antisemitic violence unleashed in the autumn of 1918 was spearheaded by armed servicemen returning from the front. Later, Jewish “traitors” inciting revolutions in the hinterland were blamed for the overthrow of the monarchy. The Hungarian version of the Stab-in-the-back theory was supported by the fact that politicians and activists of Jewish origin played a great role in the leadership of the 1918 revolution and in the subsequent Hungarian Soviet Republic.²⁸

At the same time, Jewish officers were overrepresented among the leaders of the “white guards” revolting against the Bolshevik rule as well as among the victims of the “Red Terror” targeting bourgeois elements, Jews and non-Jews alike.²⁹ The counterrevolutionary forces had quite a few Jewish members and Jewish communities offered substantive financial support. Despite that, many still interpreted the Soviet Republic as simply a “Jewish” takeover.³⁰ Vice Admiral Miklós Horthy, the supreme commander of the national army, clearly shared this opinion. On November 4, 1919, he issued a confidential order, according to which organized workers and Jews were to be excluded from recruitment. One month later, he ordered the organization of labor service (penal) companies under gendarmerie supervision from political prisoners, including Jews.³¹ An army proposal emphasized that these units should be deployed for “especially hard and dangerous” tasks.³² The newly elected government discussed the problem of Jewish recruits at

²⁸ János Gyurgyák, *A zsidókérdés Magyarországon*, 98–103.

²⁹ For example, in Szolnok, local Jews (7% of the population) constituted about 25% of the anti-Bolshevist forces. A Red detachment, led by Tibor Szamuely, a Jew, suppressed the uprising and executed twenty-four “whites,” including eight Jews. Jewish residents had to pay about 60% of the punitive tax imposed on the town. See László Csősz, [Conflicts and Interrelations. Jews in the History of Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County] *Konfliktusok és kölcsönhatások. Zsidók Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok vármegye történelmében* (Szolnok: MNL Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok Megyei Levéltára, 2014), 109–10.

³⁰ János Gyurgyák, *A zsidókérdés Magyarországon*, 111–12.

³¹ On December 6, 1919, Horthy ordered forty labor companies to be set up, each with 150 members (Karsai, “*Fegyvertelen álltak az aknamezőkön*,” vol. 1., xi).

³² Report of General Pál Nagy, September 14, 1919 (Karsai, “*Fegyvertelen álltak az aknamezőkön*,” vol. 1., ix).

one of its first meetings and proposed to set up segregated units for them.³³ Prime Minister Pál Teleki declared in his program speech that the government would organize labor service battalions for recruits declared unreliable. Teleki opined that this measure would effectively ease the problem of unemployment as well.³⁴

However, due to the provisions of the Treaty of Trianon (1920) that banned conscription, as well as to political consolidation, those plans were taken off the agenda in 1921. Jews or other minorities were not legally discriminated against in the armed forces in the following eighteen years. However, right-wing veterans' organizations dominating the army's endorsement committees made sure that only a handful of converted or highly decorated Jewish officers were allowed to stay in the active army. Before the outbreak of WWII, an estimated 5 percent of the military elites had some Jewish ancestry, but none of them were Jewish by religion.³⁵ Most of them were reservists under the Ministry of Defense and the general staff: engineers, veterinarians, physicians, administrative and logistical experts, and other specialists.³⁶ Jews were completely excluded from the ideologically and racially selected elite forces of the regime, such as the gendarmerie and the Order of Vitéz, a medieval-style knighthood established by Miklós Horthy for politically loyal ex-servicemen.

Further radicalization of the military elite from the beginning of the thirties was due to the economic and social crisis and the emergence of German Nazism, as well as to a generational shift resulting from a takeover of the military by young, ultranationalist officers. As a senior member of the militaristic student union Turul and a founding father of the leading veterans' organization Hungarian National Defense Association (Magyar Országos Véderő Egylet [MOVE]), Gyula Gömbös personified the two key political forces that were the hotbeds of interwar antisemitism and formulated the policy pertaining to Jewish men in the army. However, after being appointed prime minister, Gömbös greatly surprised his followers and

³³ Protocols of the meeting of the Council of Ministers, February 8, 1921. MNL OL K 27.

³⁴ *Az 1920. évi február hó 16-ára hirdetett Nemzetgyűlés Naplója*. IV. köt. 69. ülés., July 22, 1920.

³⁵ Sándor Szakály, *A magyar katonai elit, 1938–1945* [The Hungarian Military Elite] (Budapest: Magvető, 1987), 68–70.

³⁶ In 1939, 15.8% of the reservist military officers were Jewish. Among officers serving civilian positions, e.g. in the Ministry of Defense, this number was 24.4% (HL I-31. HM eln. A-1939-I-18338).

adversaries alike when he declared that he “had revised” his standpoint concerning Jews. During his reign, no antisemitic legislation was introduced. Of course, it was a pragmatic decision: Gömbös realized that the economic stabilization and rearmament of the country was simply impossible without the support of the Jewish industrial and professional elites. Despite that, the flow of the antisemitic “new generation” into the general staff, Ministry of Defense, and administration had serious consequences. Besides, the cohort of political leaders who made decisions affecting the labor service system was largely recruited from the radical youth movement. For example, student leader Ödön Mikecz, who proposed the Hungarian law on labor service in 1921, became one of the architects of the First Jewish Act nearly twenty years later.

In the second half of the 1930s, in the wake of the German moves to break the Versailles peace system, Hungary began reorganizing its army, launching preparations for border revisions. Military extremism gained momentum at the end of the 1930s with the political crisis and preparations for a new war. From 1937 onwards, various departments of the Ministry of Defense and General Staff held confidential meetings discussing the “Jewish question” in the army. During the decision-making process, the departments of the Ministry of Defense requested and analyzed reports on the German and Bulgarian labor service.³⁷ When conscription was reintroduced in Hungary in August 1938, army and political leaders were in unison about the specific treatment of the “problem” of Jewish recruits and reservists.

The expansionist policies of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union to reshape the political landscape of Eastern and Southeastern Europe between 1938 and 1941 activated and catalyzed centuries-long interethnic conflicts. Ethno-nationalistic empire-building endeavors of the small states falling into the German orbit led to increasingly more hostile minority policies. Border conflicts and territorial reassignments boosted state violence against minority groups considered traditional adversaries, especially those living on disputed territories.³⁸ In Croatia, the Serbs, in Bulgaria, the Turks and the Muslim Pomacs; in Romania, the Ukrainians and the Hungarians; in Hungary the Serbs and the Romanians served as primary

³⁷ See the reports of the military attachés in Sofia and Berlin, August 9 and 30, 1938, Ministry of Defense, Records of the Presidential Department ‘B’, HL I-31, Reel 1.

³⁸ Holly Case, *Between States. The Transylvanian Question and the European Idea during World War II* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 2009), 115–123, 182–186.

(but not the only) targets of state policy of discriminatory practices, despoliation, and ethnic cleansing. Due to the ultranationalist hysteria and the increasing radicalism of the military elites, various groups of “questionable loyalty” were excluded from or segregated within the armed forces and several forms of unarmed and penal service emerged. These decisions can also be interpreted as attempts of nationalist social engineers to designate the borders of the envisioned (homogenous) national community. Jews (and sometimes the Roma) became an integral and central component of the enemy’s image everywhere. Traditional interethnic conflicts acted as catalysts of anti-Jewish violence, manifested in pogroms and the arbitrary actions of military authorities. In the minds of many Axis officers, the categories of Communists, Jews, and “bandits” were closely interwoven. By 1940, all Nazi allies but Finland disarmed their Jewish soldiers.

At the same time, the system was extended to several other minority groups. Hungarian policy-makers’ notions about “enemies of the state” were reflected in the composition of the Hungarian labor battalions: their ranks included left-wingers, members of Christian denominations who refused armed service on religious grounds, and some of the ethnic minorities, including Romanians, Southern Slavs, Ruthenians, and Gypsies. Their Romanian and Bulgarian counterparts also applied a set of racial, ethnic, religious, and political categories in pursuing their aim of nationally “pure” army and society. Hundreds of thousands of people were compelled to serve in various types of labor service units in the war years. In Hungary and Romania, all citizens of military age labeled as Jewish by the race-protectionist laws were conscripted for labor service, with specific exemptions; whereas for other targeted groups this discriminatory measure was implemented selectively. Bulgarian Jews shared the same fate, but in this country the discriminatory policies against rival ethnic groups, most of all the Turks and other Muslims, were also of top priority. Therefore, all of these groups were forced into labor service units. However, Turks, Pomaks (Slavic-speaking Muslims), Serbs (Moravtsi), and Greeks served in segregated units but under the army. They often suffered the same harsh treatment, but received payment and were not visually stigmatized, like the Jews.³⁹ In Romania, mostly Ukrainians, Bulgarians, and Hungarians were forced into unarmed units.

³⁹ Steven F. Sage, *Bulgaria* (manuscript). *USHMM Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933–1945*, 2013.

The Evolution of the Labor Service System, 1939–41

It is no surprise then that all major decisions concerning the military service of Jews and the labor service system between 1939 and 1941 were connected to the stages of territorial revision. The final impetus to the creation of Hungary's national defense law and mandatory labor service was the First Vienna Award in November 1938. The war crisis in Subcarpathia, in the spring of 1939 (and the annexation of territories with a large Jewish population) was followed by another round of administrative meetings pertaining to the "Jewish question" in the army. Most of the decision-makers agreed that Hungary should not have followed the German example, where the Jews were exempted from military service requirement. During the preliminary discussions about the armed service of Jews between 1937 and 1939, three main concepts emerged. Jews should:

1. Serve in segregated combat troops, under harsh discipline of non-Jewish officers and deployed in particularly dangerous positions or used as skirmishers in front of the battle lines
2. Be divided proportionately into the ranks
3. Serve as unarmed labor servicemen

The majority of the officers supported the second option, arguing that this way the Jews could be easily supervised and their chances to desert or sabotage would be reduced. The main concern about unarmed service was that this way the Jews would suffer fewer casualties and this "privilege" would incite animosities in the public, first of all among ordinary soldiers. Minister of Defense Károly Bartha, however, supported unarmed service: the main argument behind this plan was that the Jews, if serving in combat units, would reduce the morale of the fighting troops with their "defeatist and destructive" behavior.⁴⁰ However, the final decision concerning the military service of Jews was postponed for the time being.

The ministry issued an order to the effect that Jews deemed fit for armed service have to be divided proportionately into fighting troops, whereas those deemed unfit must be organized into separate units. In

⁴⁰ Pro domo on the meeting, Ministry of Defense, April 5, 1939, Proposal of the presidential department of the Ministry of Defense, April 12. HL I-31. HM eln. A-1939-I-18338.

neither case were Jews allowed to serve in positions that required reliability (and also carried a lesser risk of dying), such as positions in the signal corps, messenger or administrative positions.⁴¹ The first labor service battalions were set up in July 1939. From this time on, increasingly more Jews were forced into these units. The army declared that only volunteers “accountable to their loyalty to the nation” were accepted, which in practice meant that Jews were not welcome.⁴² Citing the Second Jewish Law forbidding state service by the Jews, the Ministry of Defense proposed that Jews could not hold officer and non-commissioned officer ranks. It was actually not a pressing issue: in April 1939, there were 2,292 Jewish rookies and second-year conscripts in the army, and only 30 of them were promoted to warrant officers. Out of 11,568 active NCOs only 11 were Jews. There were only 4 Jews among the active officers, all of them converts.⁴³

The Royal Hungarian Army gave way to antiminority discriminatory practices, which went beyond the existing laws and decrees, or were based on the “creative,” extended interpretations of them. For example, they implemented the Second Jewish Law thoroughly, using stricter criteria: even those officers who had one Jewish great-grandparent were dismissed. Head of General Staff Henrik Werth openly declared in April 1940 that alongside the political solution (which many officers found too lenient) the army had to pursue “a radical and urgent solution to the Jewish problem in an administrative way.” The draft by the General Staff Headquarters wanted to subject to the labor service requirement even those non-Jews who had a Jewish spouse.⁴⁴ The presidential department of the Ministry of Defense argued that the Jewish work force had to be utilized to the maximum, and Jews should not be allowed to stay behind the front line, engaging in “activities against the nation.” For radicals of the ministry and the general staff it was one of the most important lessons of World War I. As a result, many Jewish intellectuals and specialists were mobilized for physical work, often against economic rationality.

The fate of the Jews serving in the army was sealed in the summer of 1940: when mobilizing the army for the proposed war against Romania,

⁴¹ Decree No. A.-1939-I.-26149 of the Ministry of Defense, September 23, 1939 (Karsai, “*Fegyvertelen álltak az aknamezőkön*,” vol. 1, 102–5).

⁴² Decree No. 1939-eln. 16.-27228 of the Ministry of Defense, July 4, 1939.

⁴³ Proposal of Presidential Department “A” of the Ministry of Defense, April 4, 1939 (Karsai, “*Fegyvertelen álltak az aknamezőkön*,” vol. 1, 14–21).

⁴⁴ Karsai, “*Fegyvertelen álltak az aknamezőkön*,” xxxiv.

the General Staff issued an order according to which all Jewish conscripts (with the exemption of physicians, drivers, and other specialists) were called up into special (segregated) labor service companies. By July 1940, sixty Jewish companies were set up. Those who already served in the army remained in the force. However, after the annexation of Transylvania in September, these people were also disarmed and subsequently drafted for labor service. Furthermore, the Ministry of Defense mobilized all the Jewish men of military age (21–39 years). The main motivation behind this decision, according to the explanation of the General Staff, was “to prevent the Jews to do harmful activity in the hinterland in any respect” and to ensure the populace that “the Jews will not avoid the burden of war or mobilization.”⁴⁵ Finally, in the spring of 1941, parallel to the invasion of Yugoslavia, Hungarian Jews lost their right to carry arms.⁴⁶

The situation of Romanian Jews in the army before the war was largely similar to that of their Hungarian counterparts. By 1939, they mostly served in noncombat positions. Romanian Jews were excluded from the armed forces weeks after the first dramatic territorial loss of the country in June 1940. The Jewish Statute of August 9, 1940, excluded Jews from the army, with the exception of those who were granted citizenship before 1918 or were decorated in Romania’s wars. They stayed in the army temporarily, albeit without ranks. A special tax was imposed on those expelled from service.⁴⁷ The second wave of territorial reassignments (to Bulgaria and Hungary) incited antisemitic violence: the Romanian army initiated pogroms and in many units soldiers killed their Jewish comrades-in-arms.⁴⁸ The first labor camps on Romanian territory were set up in September 1940: these were in fact arbitrary initiatives of local administrative or military leaders. The labor service system was legally introduced only in December.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Proposal of the 1st Department of the General Staff to the Ministry of Defense, August 2, 1940. HL Vkf eln. 1. 4242/1940.

⁴⁶ Prime Minister’s Decree No. 2870/1941, April 19, 1941, *Rendeletek tára* (1941), vol. 2, 1028–29.

⁴⁷ Jean Ancel, ed., *Documents Concerning the Fate of Romanian Jewry During the Holocaust* 12 Vols. (New York: Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1986, vol. 5), 185–88.

⁴⁸ Jean Ancel, *The Economic Destruction of Romanian Jewry* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2007), 62–64.

⁴⁹ Decree law no. 3984, December 9, 1940.

In Bulgaria, revisionist successes had similar results. Bulgarian policy-makers began penning the first discriminatory law in the summer of 1940, following the negotiations held in Germany. The national defense law, issued in January 1941, excluded Jews from state employment and the army. Jews could only serve in labor camps. A high exemption tax was imposed on them. The introduction of the system was closely intertwined with large-scale Aryanization.⁵⁰ However, Jewish youth continued to serve in the civilian labor service along with their Bulgarian counterparts. Their exclusion in July 1941 was due to direct German involvement: the commander-in-chief of the RAD, who worked on joint projects in Bulgaria, protested against this practice. The Bulgarian government, appreciative for another territorial gain at the expense of Yugoslavia, listened to the demand. Hence, segregated units were created for the Jewish premilitary youth. Furthermore, all Jewish men between 20 and 45 years were drafted for the labor service: a decision similar to the Hungarian mobilization one year before. Jews were deprived of uniforms and had to wear yellow insignia. Just like the yellow armbands imposed on Hungarian Jews, it was an (illegal) measure exceeding the laws in effect.⁵¹ A separate administrative unit was created to manage Jewish participation in the labor service within the Ministry of Public Works, under the name the "Department of Temporary Labor," which revealed the Bulgarian government's ultimate goals with this force.⁵²

By 1941, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria equally excluded Jews from the armed forces. However, they had to perform mandatory unarmed service, which was *integrated into the general system of labor service* in all the three countries. Although non-Jews and Jews often performed the same type of work, the ideological background and functions of their employment was fundamentally different. The Hungarian system, for example, united three different types of labor service:

1. National defense labor service (*honvédelmi munkaszolgálat*): based on duties imposed on peasants before the abolition of serfdom

⁵⁰ Vicki Tamir, *Bulgaria and Her Jews: The History of a Dubious Symbiosis* (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press for Yeshiva University Press, 1979), 170–72.

⁵¹ The legal basis of such decisions was the Bulgarian law of June 1941 and the Hungarian law of February 1939 (141.§.), which allowed the government, when faced with the dangers of war, to introduce "decrees that differ from the laws in effect."

⁵² Sage, *Bulgaria*.

in 1848,⁵³ it was a form of *obligatory work* imposed on all adult members of civil society (with specific exceptions). The Act on National Defense of 1939 prescribed defense labor requirement (*honvédelmi munkakötelezettség*) for all citizens between 14 and 70 who did not serve in the army.⁵⁴ Despite the Hungarian terminology, the national defense labor service, according to Patel's definition, does not meet the criteria of labor service. It does not have temporal limitations, it involves real financial compensation and, most of all, does not have pedagogical (and, we can add, ideological and discriminatory) dimensions.⁵⁵

2. A range of *civilian* initiatives for *voluntary labor service* (*önkéntes munkaszolgálat*) that served as precursors for the state-controlled system. These initiatives, even though financially supported by the state, were organized and run by social organizations and movements. Unlike national defense labor service, it was a form of labor service *per se*, as in this case a defined group of society was employed for a limited time to perform physical labor for public (common) interest. In Hungary, just like in its Axis allies, these were almost exclusively projects having military dimensions.
3. *Public interest labor service* (*közérdekű munkaszolgálat*) was introduced by Act II of 1939, and involved all Hungarian citizens between the ages of 21 and 24 who were deemed unfit for armed service. These conscripts were compelled to perform labor service in military-controlled work camps for a maximum span of three months. Opposed to previous forms of labor service, it was *mandatory and state organized*. Despite its neutral wording, the passage was primarily intended to sort out the "ideologically unfit," that is, politically unreliable recruits.⁵⁶ This category was largely based on ethnic and racial stigmatization. Thus, the system created the legal framework for the gradual introduction of restrictions against Jews and other "internal others," which subsequently lead to complete segregation.

⁵³ Act IX of 1844 on regulating public works. Postfeudal laws of 1871:XVIII, 1876:V, and 1886:XXII regulating labor service duties also referred to this act.

⁵⁴ Act II of 1939 on National Defense, 87–94. §. Act II of 1939 on National Defense was an outline law, therefore its implementation was regulated by subsequent decrees.

⁵⁵ Patel, *Soldiers of Labor*, introduction.

⁵⁶ More precisely, from the first day of the year when they turned twenty-one to the end of the year of their twenty-fourth birthday (Act II of 1939, 230. §).

In June 1939 these three types of labor service were administratively united under the umbrella of the national superintendent of the public interest labor service of the Ministry of Defense. This main office supervised two fundamentally different groups: *civilians* mobilized for national defense labor service (*national defense workers*) and *conscripts* drafted for unarmed service (*military labor servicemen*). The first category engulfed (theoretically) the entire population (except those who served in the army or belonged to special categories), whereas the second applied to those “unfit” for military service. The Hungarian Ministry of Defense began organizing three types of unarmed military labor service units in the summer of 1939: public interest labor service battalions (*közérdekű munkaszolgálatos zászlóaljak*) based on public interest labor service requirements, as prescribed by Act II of 1939, 230.§.; military labor service companies (*katonai munkásszázadok*) recruited from the members of various ethnic groups and ethnic Hungarians, who were drafted under the universal military service requirement; and “special” (Jewish/political) labor service companies (*különleges munkásszázadok*), for the establishment of which there was no legal basis.

Initially, the provisions, equipment, and treatment of all labor servicemen were the same as for soldiers. Jewish reservists were allowed to keep their rank and uniform. However, Jewish conscripts were gradually deprived of most of these rights, which was also reflected in the terminology. Instead of enlisting for “military duty,” Jews were provided “auxiliary service duty” (*kisegítő szolgálati kötelezettség*). The widows of fallen labor servicemen were called “national defense widows” (*honvédelmi özvegy*), instead of “war widows” (*hadiözvegy*). Unlike other groups enlisted for labor service, Jews were prohibited from wearing any national insignia. From the spring of 1940, several reports were filed about atrocities and mistreatment at labor service units, mostly against Jews, but also against ethnic minorities, such as Serbs.⁵⁷ The situation of the labor servicemen further deteriorated after summer 1941, when Hungary entered the war against the Soviet Union. Contrary to certain retrospect views and historical analyses, it is clear that the enlisted men regarded labor service as a fundamentally punitive and humiliating measure, even if treatment was not particularly brutal. Political and church leaders of ethnic minori-

⁵⁷ Records of the 1st Royal Hungarian Honvéd Corps, 1940, 23375/Eln. IV. HL, II. 1239, Reel 24.

ties as well as some administrative leaders of the reannexed territories repeatedly opposed the practice.⁵⁸

The segregation of Jewish conscripts was retroactively legalized and systematized by Act XIV of 1942 more than two years later. The draft of the bill involved considerable debate among the decision-makers. The departments of the Ministry of Justice involved put forward a proposal that aimed to exempt Jews from the military-service requirement. The Ministry of Defense, however, argued for the opposite: to make military service compulsory for them. The General Staff headquarters went even further and sought to subject to compulsory labor service even those non-Jews who had a Jewish spouse. As the act was debated in parliament, the far-right opposition put forth even more radical proposals, for example, the establishment of labor camps and ghettos for the Jews.⁵⁹

The reasons attached to the bill emphasized the principle that

“Jews cannot perform armed service in the Hungarian Army and must fulfill their military obligations through auxiliary military service. This principle and the declaration and implementation thereof with respect to the Hungarian Army ensures uniformity with the provisions of the so-called “Jewish laws,” which are intended to secure the exclusion of the Jews from government as well as public employment, and keep them from assuming the intellectual leadership of the country. Thus, no argument or extended explanation is needed to justify this bill’s goal that the Jews should likewise be excluded from the armed sections of the Hungarian army. After all, the individual and the corporate life of the armed forces is the primary realm in which in every respect the requirements of the Hungarian national movement and of the Christian moral conception must prevail uninterruptedly”.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Records of the Prime Minister’s Office, Department of Nationalities and Minorities, MNL OL K 28. 164.

⁵⁹ *Képviselőházi Napló*, vol. XIV, meeting no. 271, June 24, 1942, 156–57.

⁶⁰ Introduction to and articles of Act XIV of 1942 on the Modification and Extension of Act II of 1939 on National Defense and Act IV of 1938 on the Recognition of the Achievements of Combat Veterans of the 1914–18 World War, in *1942. évi Országos Törvénytar* (Budapest: Magyar Királyi Belügyminisztérium, 1943), 76–89. Published in Zoltán Vági, László Csősz, and Gábor Kádár, *The Holocaust in Hungary: Evolution of a Genocide* (Washington, DC: AltaMira Press-USHMM, 2013), 50–51.

Military officers subject to the “Jewish laws” lost their rank. The department within the Ministry of Defense that handled staff matters provided the following explanation for the proposal: “Therefore someone who is—as codified—considered stigmatized by society because of his racial affiliation, stigmatized even within civilian society, cannot remain an officer.”⁶¹

Units recruited from Jews were subsequently labeled *auxiliary labor service companies* (*kisegítő munkásszázadok*). From this time on, the term “special” was used for companies organized from common criminals, and the politically unreliable, including Communists, trade unionists and other leftist opponents of the regime, as well as the members of Christian denominations who refused armed service on moral and theological grounds (Jehovah’s Witnesses, Nazarenes, Pentecostals, Adventists). Even though having the same name, the units of “sectarians” (as the regime labeled them) were usually subjected to different treatment than the units recruited from political enemies, including Jews. The latter were *de facto* penal companies, which suffered extremely harsh treatment and exceptionally high casualties. Jews considered politically “reliable” were serving in field (“mixed”) labor service companies (*tábori [vegyes] munkaszolgálatos századok*), where the treatment was generally more lenient.

By 1942, about 100,000 men served in Hungarian military labor service units, the majority of which were Jewish. Finally, as a result of the total mobilization for war, all labor service units and civilians employed for military tasks were put under the National Defense Labor Organization (Honvédelmi Munkaszervezet) established by the decree of Miklós Horthy in November 1943.⁶² By this time, the number of people serving in labor service exceeded 800,000.

Unlike in other Axis satellites, in Hungary compulsory labor service remained under the *exclusive jurisdiction of the Ministry of Defense*, which involved exceptionally strong political and administrative control of the army. The organizational scheme of the labor service system followed the structure of the army units. The highest administrative unit was the battalion (*zászlóalj*), but labor servicemen were actually deployed in companies (*század*), occasionally in platoons (*szakasz*). In Romania and Bulgaria, by contrast, the labor service system underwent certain administrative shifts, but ultimately it was put under the dual control of the mili-

⁶¹ Karsai, “*Fegyvertelen álltak az aknamezőkön*,” vol. 1., xli.

⁶² Karsai, “*Fegyvertelen álltak az aknamezőkön*,” vol. 2., 456–64.

tary and civilian authorities. The labor service system was managed in the Ministry of Labor (as well as the General Staff) in Romania and the Ministry of Public Works in Bulgaria, but the work units (temporary groups or bands, sized according to the type of work performed), were under army supervision.

This difference was more than a bureaucratic nuance. Due to the political domination of the army over this issue, the early period of the Hungarian military labor service system was characterized by strong *nationalistic, ideological, and social pedagogical motivations*. The system was envisioned as a preventive and punitive measure against Jews and other internal enemies as well as a venue for the “physical disciplining and moral education” of these groups.⁶³ In the increasingly dense atmosphere of the “cold war” preceding Hungary’s entry into the war, radical circles in the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff were striving for the total mobilization of Jewish men, despite any pragmatic considerations. However, more realistic and sensible approaches were also present. This generated conflicts with civilian authorities, but also within the military. For example, military commanders assigned to factories producing for the army (*hadiüzemek*) protested against engineers, skilled workers, and other indispensable experts being drafted for labor service.⁶⁴

Ultimately, the views of the radical circles dominating the military overpowered other proposals and considerations. As a result, Hungary became the only country to deploy large numbers of unarmed auxiliary units in combat zones. Similar considerations emerged in the other satellites as well, but were never implemented. For example, the Bulgarian general staff considered attaching labor service units to its forces facing the offensive of the Red Army in the summer of 1944. However, due to Bulgaria’s switch over to the Allies’ side, such operation never took place.⁶⁵ Bulgarian and Romanian labor service units never operated outside the (extended) national borders. Hence their survival rates were much higher, although the general mistreatment of the labor servicemen in the three countries did not diverge. Malnutrition, insufficient housing, and sanitary conditions, harsh discipline and even brutalities were commonplace in many units. However, in the context of barbaric warfare and extreme conditions on the Eastern front, these practices had more deadly conse-

⁶³ Preamble of the Act XIV of 1942 on labor service. 1942. XIV. tc., in 1942. *évi Országos Törvénytár*, 76–89.

⁶⁴ HL I-31, Reel 1.

⁶⁵ Sage, *Bulgaria*.

quences. Some Hungarian units turned into “mobile killing sites,” as one survivor put it, even though methodic genocide was not part of the system as a whole.⁶⁶

Although strong ideological motivations were also present, Romanian and Bulgarian policy-makers prioritized the *economic exploitation* of the Jewish communities and the *utilization of the expertise* of Jewish intellectuals and skilled workers for the economy. Decree Law No. 3984 of 1940, for example, excluded all Jews from armed service (including those exempted by the statute), but also stipulated that Jewish experts could be employed by the Ministry of Defense and its subordinate institutions (including factories of war production), were allowed to wear the uniform and should be paid regular fees.⁶⁷ Premilitary and military duties of Jewish citizens were transformed into financial (tax) and work duties. According to the calculation of the Federation of Romanian Jewish Communities, the military tax could have been as high as 45% of the annual income of a person.⁶⁸ With Romania entering the war, the taxes increased even further.

Jews who paid a ransom could be exempted from service. The Bulgarian National Defense Law of 1941 also introduced indemnity tax for those who were unfit for hard physical labor. In Bulgaria, the purchase of exemption was not allowed legally, but in practice many could buy themselves out by giving a bribe.⁶⁹ In Hungary, by contrast, exemption was a rarity and mobilization was often imposed against any economic rationality and social welfare interests. Unlike in Romania, skilled Jewish workers, engineers, and other professionals were more often forced to work as physical laborers. For example, upon the demands of the anti-semitic National Alliance of Hungarian Doctors, many Jewish physicians were drafted for labor service and performed manual labor.⁷⁰ At the same time, the labor service system effectively served as a *method of political vendetta and individual vengeance*. Call-ups were often performed on an individual basis and based on private demands. This provided an opportunity

⁶⁶ Elemér Sallai, *Mozgó vesztőhely* [Mobile Killing Site] (Budapest: Magvető, 1979).

⁶⁷ Csósz and Gidó, *Munca obligatorie a evreilor din România și Ungaria*, 10.

⁶⁸ Decree Law No. 132 of the Ministry of Finances, *Monitorul Oficial al României*, January 21, 1941, No. 17, 339–341.

⁶⁹ Tamir, *Bulgaria and Her Jews*, 170–72.

⁷⁰ Mária M. Kovács, *Liberal Professions, Illiberal Politics: Hungary from the Habsburgs to the Holocaust* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press/New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 122–27.

for the elimination of the leftist and liberal political opposition, critical journalists, and other undesirable intellectuals, business rivals, etc., and also offered a way to solve personal conflicts. These factors also worked against the economic efficiency of the system.

The priority of economic motivations therefore did not necessarily mean rationality. The system was characterized by *corruption, nepotism, and bureaucratic anomalies*, especially in Romania and Bulgaria. Bribery and unauthorized leave were quite common in these countries. In Romania, more than 200 Jewish officers remained in the army due to administrative faults or hidden identities.⁷¹ In Hungary, a somewhat stronger discipline prevailed and the forces were more thoroughly purged. On the level of the units, however, the difference was not significant: blackmail, withdrawal of food and provisions, and outright robbery were prevalent in all the three countries. Due to poor organization, ad hoc strategic planning, and the largely unskilled and physically unfit workforce, the performance of the labor service units was insufficient, with few exceptions. Despite the efforts during the course of war to reorganize and rationalize the systems, these problems prevailed and had a negative impact on the national economies. The labor service system, therefore, which was intended to support the war effort, in fact hindered it in many respects and had several *economic and public welfare side effects*.

With the total mobilization for war, all the systems reached their peak in 1943–44. By this time, as German military and political power was declining, all satellite states reconsidered their Jewish policies. Of course, this also influenced the fate of the labor servicemen. The systems created in a rabidly antisemitic context ultimately meant survival for many: the majority of able-bodied Jewish men living in the heartlands of the three countries survived the war. Historians often refer to the decisions of Bulgarian and Hungarian authorities as “rescue operations” to thwart Nazi genocidal plans. The situation was actually more complex. The series of events that ultimately saved the lives of labor servicemen were the results of conflicting antisemitic policies and a rivalry between and within various levels of the power structure. Neither the Hungarian nor the Bulgarian army was willing to hand over valuable manpower to the Nazis. It was probably also the manifestation of the anti-Nazi attitudes of some officers.

⁷¹ Ancel, *The Economic Destruction*, 63.

At the same time, both armies introduced strict preventive measures upon the labor servicemen stationed in the country and who were still considered an internal threat.⁷² Deportation of the labor servicemen, in fact, was only suspended: there was no ultimate decision about their fate and handing them over to the Germans had remained an option until their countries broke the Axis alliance or were overcome.

⁷² The leader of the Bulgarian KEV suggested the call-up of all Jewish men between eighteen and forty-eight as a preparatory measure for the mass deportations. Belev to Gabrovski, February 4, 1943 (Nathan Grinberg, ed., *Dokumenti* [Sofia: Central Consistory of Jews in Bulgaria, 1945], 8–11.

Master Plan? The Decision-Making Process behind the Deportations

Krisztián Ungváry

Among historians and publicists there is still no consensus as to which German and Hungarian decisions led to the deportation of 437,000 Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz and how the deportations could have taken place so quickly before they were unexpectedly halted.¹ Another open question is why some people whose labor might well have proved particularly useful to Nazi Germany were spared deportation. The scope of this chapter does not allow for a detailed investigation of each stage of the decision-making process that led to the deportations. This needs to be the subject of future research, for which this chapter can offer insights. Here, with a view to reconstructing the decision-making process in broad terms, I shall present

¹ The theories on this subject are summarized in Christian Gerlach, “A magyarországi zsidóság deportálása” [The deportation of Hungarian Jewry], in *A holokauszt Magyarországon európai perspektívában* [The Holocaust in Hungary from a European perspective], ed. László Karsai and Judit Molnár (Budapest, 2005), 469–478. See also László Karsai, “A holokauszt utolsó fejezete (könyvkritika)” [The last chapter of the Holocaust (a book critique)], *Beszélő* 10 (2005), <http://beszelo.c3.hu/cikkek/a-holokauszt-utolso-fejezete>; Gábor Kádár and Zoltán Vági, *Hullarablás. A magyar zsidóság gazdasági megsemmisítése* [Robbing the corpses: The economic destruction of Hungarian Jewry] (Budapest: Hannah Arendt Egyesület–Jaffa Kiadó, 2005), 114–46. The relevant section of the book is entitled “Deportálási teóriák” [Deportation theories], but the authors cover only some of the views of scholars published to date. For a more recent work, see Gábor Kádár and Zoltán Vági, *A végső döntés—Berlin, Budapest, Birkenau 1944* [The final decision—Berlin, Budapest, Birkenau, 1944] (Budapest, 2013). This work discusses the issue of the deportations in greater detail, but once again several aspects are ignored. A discussion of the historiography of the issue clearly lies outside the scope of this chapter and so, in the following, I make reference only to the major works.

the strategies employed by the German decision-makers between February and April 1944, the expectations brought to bear on Hungary, and the options left open to the Hungarian government. I discuss how and to what extent the German and Hungarian authorities coordinated the deportations. I also investigate the primary aim of the deportations from Nazi Germany's perspective, as well as the extent to which the Hungarian government knew of this aim. In closing, I will explore why the deportations from Hungary were halted for a time in July 1944. My main argument is that there was no deportation "master plan." Rather, in my view, the events are best analyzed and interpreted using Hans Mommsen's concept of "cumulative radicalization,"² whereby due consideration must be given to the important role played by the Hungarian authorities.

The German Backdrop and Nazi Germany's Expectations

Many people believe that the deportation of Hungary's Jewish population was rendered inevitable by the German occupation of the country in March 1944. Ignoring the findings and conclusions of the historical experts,³ Mária Schmidt, holder of the Széchenyi Prize (a top-level state award) and the principal advocate of Hungary's current memory policy, has asserted on several occasions that "in every country the Germans solved the Jewish question in a similar manner."⁴ In fact, we know that the methods employed by the Germans in the course of World War II to solve what they called the "Jewish question" varied significantly among the countries that were allied to, or occupied by, Germany. No one was deported to the Nazi death camps from Bulgaria or Romania,⁵ and while

² On the "cumulative radicalization" theory, see Hans Mommsen, "Die Realisierung des Utopischen. Die 'Endlösung der Judenfrage' im Dritten Reich," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 9 (1983): 386.

³ In this field, works by Randolph L. Braham are the most important. See Randolph L. Braham, *A Holocaustzt* [The Holocaust] (Budapest: Láng Kiadó, 2002); Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

⁴ Mária Schmidt, "És az én érzékenységem nem számít?" [And my sensitivities do not matter?], *Népszabadság*, July 12, 2014.

⁵ In Bulgaria, as the exception, there were deportations from the territories that had been annexed by the country. Similarly, in Romania, there were no deportations from areas that had already belonged to the country prior to 1940, but radically antisemitic measures were taken in Moldavia and in Transnistria—but only until 1942.

only a small number of Jews were taken from France, almost everyone was deported from Belgium and the Netherlands.⁶ Indeed, examining the percentages of Jews who survived the Holocaust in the various countries, we find striking differences. Although the Germans indisputably sought similar results in every country, they were evidently unable to realize their plans everywhere.

At a meeting in Klessheim on March 18, 1944, Hitler informed Horthy of the conditions Hungary was required to fulfill. No official record was made of this meeting, and so we do not know the exact demands of the German Führer. Still, on March 19, Horthy informed the Crown Council that one of Hitler's conditions was "the settlement of the Jewish question." It is unlikely that Hitler addressed the technical details of the required measures at the meeting in Klessheim. There is certainly no reference to his having done so, and we know that Hitler was inclined to speak in rather general terms on such occasions.

As part of the peculiar context of the deportation of Hungarian Jewry, Horthy and Sztójay were told by the German authorities on several occasions that the German occupation force would withdraw from the country once "the Jewish question [had] been solved." The specific details of the "solution" were not mentioned, however. On April 17, 1944, Horthy candidly told László Endre that he was consenting to the deportations because this was the price to be paid for ending the German occupation.⁷ It is possible that Horthy, whose intellectual powers were failing, believed that Hungary would indeed regain its sovereignty by sacrificing its Jewish populace, and this may explain why he consented to the deportations.⁸ Yet, in the shadow of the approaching Soviet army, it is unclear what Horthy planned to do with the additional leeway he expected to gain

⁶ For the full data, see László Karsai, *Holokausz* [Holocaust] (Budapest: Pannonic, 2001), 15.

⁷ László Karsai and Judit Molnár, eds., *Az Endre-Baky-Ĵaross-per* [The Trial of Endre, Baky and Jaross] (Budapest: Cserépfalvi, 1994), 50. László Endre's hearing took place on December 17, 1945. Other sources confirm Horthy's position.

⁸ The authors on Horthy agree on this. See Ádám Gellért and Dávid Turbucz, "Egy elmaradt felelősségre vonás margójára. Horthy Miklós Nürnbergben" [For the margins of a missing indictment: Miklós Horthy in Nuremberg], *Betekintő* 4 (2012): 5–10; Dávid Turbucz, "Horthy Miklós antiszemitizmusa. A kormányzó szerepe a zsidóság sorsának alakulásában 1919 és 1944 között" [The antisemitism of Miklós Horthy: The role of the regent in determining the fate of the Jews], *Kommentár* 5 (2012); László Karsai, "A végső döntésképtelenség" [The final indecisiveness], *Századok* 148.1 (2014): 183–200; Kádár and Vági, *Hullarablás*, 131.

by delivering up hundreds of thousands of people to an uncertain fate. It seems he must have known that as Soviet troops continued their relentless advance towards Hungary, Hitler would be bound, at some point, to deploy a German force to Hungary with a view to defending the Carpathian basin. In other words, the Wehrmacht was certain to make a return to the country. Here at least, Horthy's political miscalculation and his personal responsibility are plainly seen.

For an appraisal of the following it is necessary to make a source-critical comment. The people's tribunals—and I shall quote various statements made at such trials—were far from being impeccable legal procedures. Still, Sztójay and his associates were not tortured; nor were they compelled to make false statements and confessions. There were many instances of accused persons who sought to diminish their role in events, and so it is particularly interesting when, through their own testimony, defendants in effect incriminated themselves. And such testimonies are rendered credible by the circumstances in which they were made. The defendants could have blamed everything on the German occupiers, asserting that they themselves had been acting under duress and in response to threats. They might also have counted on the fact that some of their German accomplices could no longer be brought to trial and that the credibility of those who were put on trial and called to give statements would be called into question. Moreover, at the time, the court had very limited access to the original documents. However, as we shall see, the Hungarian defendants did not opt for this tactic, even though it would have offered them at least a small chance of acquittal.

The sources underline that the German occupiers were still lacking fully crystallized plans in March 1944. Of course, evidence of the opposite can be found in a superficial reading of the sources: on March 20, 1944—based on Sztójay's statement at the trial of László Endre and his associates—Ernst Kaltenbrunner, head of the RSHA,⁹ told Sztójay, who was yet to be appointed as prime minister, that Hungary must settle the "Jewish question, doing so in line with the formalities and circumstances seen in other countries, such as Germany and France, and so forth."¹⁰ At his own trial, however, Sztójay's recollection differed somewhat. Under questioning, Sztójay stated that Kaltenbrunner had not demanded that the

⁹ Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA), in English: Reich Main Security Office.

¹⁰ Sztójay's statement, December 9, 1945. See Karsai and Molnár, *Endre-Baky-Jaross*, 326–27.

Jewish question be settled as in France. Rather, he had said it should be dealt with “in the German fashion.”¹¹

Evidently, it is possible that, at the People’s Tribunal trial of László Endre and his associates, Sztójay had erroneously listed the countries mentioned by Kaltenbrunner. It appears certain, however, that the Germans had told him of their plans only in general terms. As already noted, in Nazi Germany’s sphere of influence, the marginalization and persecution of the Jews and their subsequent exclusion from society were accomplished in different ways—and in some places there was no persecution. The wide variation in the numbers of survivors is indicative of this. The methods of implementation ranged from localized mass shootings to deportation to the death camps—or even to the authorization of various exemptions. Indeed, in several countries, some Jewish people were not even required to wear the yellow star. For instance, in Slovakia, Romania, and France, citizens of the country who were Jewish generally did not have to wear the yellow star, and many of them escaped the first wave of deportations. This applied to two out of three Jews in France, to everyone in the Romanian regions of Southern Transylvania and the Regat, and to one in four Jews in Slovakia.¹² It is, therefore, unlikely that Nazi Germany had specific expectations with regard to Hungary. Rather, the Germans seem to have acted in a pragmatic manner, formulating general demands whose interpretation depended upon the given political situation.

Andor Jaross, who had served as interior minister in the Sztójay government, might well have claimed, at his postwar trial, that Nazi Germany had demanded the deportation of the Jews from the Hungarian government. In actual fact, however, he stated that at a meeting of the Ministerial Council in March those attending had discussed “to what extent and degree they should seek to solve this problem, and, if I remember rightly, it was then that the prime minister pointed out that the Germans generally sought such a solution, and that they had laid out the prospect ... of a withdrawal of the SS divisions if we were to divide off the Jews from the rest of the population and enact laws minimizing their influence on other sections of the population.”¹³

¹¹ Döme Sztójay’s statement, March 5, 1946. See László Karsai, Judit Molnár, and Irén Simándi, ed., *A magyar Quisling-kormány: Sztójay Döme és társai a népbíróság előtt* [The Hungarian Quisling government: Döme Sztójay and his associates at the People’s Tribunal] (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 2004), 213–14.

¹² See Karsai, *Holokauszt*, 118–208.

¹³ Andor Jaross’s hearing, December 20, 1945. See Karsai and Molnár, *Endre–Baky–Jaross*, 136.

Subsequently, Jaross attempted to defend himself by stating that German “demands” were public knowledge and so “infinitely little [had] depended on [the actions of] individuals.” Further, he did not object when the court summarized his opinion as follows: All measures against the Jews had been taken “under German pressure.”¹⁴ Even so, other than the introduction of the yellow star, Jaross failed to mention any specific instances when he or the government had been subjected to overwhelming German pressure regarding policy towards the Jews. Thus, he practically acknowledged that in tangible matters the Hungarian government had been able to decide what should be done.

Sztójay, in his trial, noted that he and the competent German personnel had “not discussed the deportations ... and deportation, as a demand, was never mentioned.”¹⁵ This statement is extremely important for various reasons. First, it proves that, at the time, a “settlement of the Jewish question” was not necessarily understood to mean deportation, as the former demand was not disputed by Sztójay during the trial. Second, by making this statement, Sztójay in effect incriminated himself. If the court had dwelt on the issue, the outcome would have been fatal for Sztójay: in the absence of a German demand for the deportations, the responsibility would clearly have lain with the Hungarian side rather than with the Germans. We cannot exclude the possibility that Sztójay had forgotten about the pressure exerted by the Germans. Yet it seems unlikely that he would have compromised himself in such an essential matter. If he did make a mistake, then this can be understood in several ways, because, firstly, a “settlement of the Jewish question” and “deportation” are not identical concepts and, secondly, Sztójay’s political fellows had been seeking the deportation of the Jews even prior to the German occupation,¹⁶ thus rendering a request by Veessenmayer in this matter superfluous. The situation was different when it came to Horthy and the wavering members of the public administrative apparatus. In their case,

¹⁴ Andor Jaross’s statement, December 20, 1945. See Karsai and Molnár, *Endre-Baky-Jaross*, 154.

¹⁵ Döme Sztójay’s statement, March 5, 1946. See Karsai, Molnár, and Simándi, *A magyar Quisling-kormány*, 214.

¹⁶ The resettlement (expulsion) of the Jewish population was included in the programs of the governing party and extreme right-wing opposition parties. For more details, see Krisztián Ungváry, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege. Diszkrimináció, szociálpolitika és antiszemitizmus Magyarországon* [A balance sheet of the Horthy regime: Discrimination, social policy and antisemitism in Hungary] (Pécs: OSZK-Jelenkor, 2012).

pressure may have been required, but the Germans presumably knew that as far as Sztójay was concerned it was unnecessary for them to make suggestions concerning policy. That the deportation of the Jews was merely a desire rather than a demand on the part of the Germans was stated not only by Sztójay. Jaross and his state secretaries, László Baký and László Endre, made the same claim in their statements to the court,¹⁷ even though this single admission would have sufficed for a death sentence. The only specific German demand mentioned by Jaross at his own trial was “the urgent need to mark [the Jews] with the star.” He claimed that Winkelmann had told him of this demand in early April 1944, while Sztójay had been informed of it by Veesenmayer.¹⁸ When the court asked Jaross and Sztójay to explain the adoption of decrees stipulating the separation of the Jews from the general population and banning them from certain professions, neither of the two men even mentioned German “pressure.”¹⁹

It would seem, therefore, that Horthy and the Hungarian government had significant freedom of action in their response to German demands. Those involved were aware of this, as shown by a document dating from late June 1944 in which Horthy, reviewing the deportations, acknowledged that “more had happened in our country than in Germany itself.”²⁰ The same conclusion can be drawn from documents delivered to Horthy before this time, which relate how the deportations from Hungary had been more rigorous and merciless than those undertaken by the Germans from the occupied countries.²¹ Both Miklós Mester, state secretary for religious and educational affairs, and Mihály Jungerth-Arnóthy, deputy minister for foreign affairs, referred to this circumstance when calling for a halt to the deportations at the Crown Council meeting on June 26 and at meetings of

¹⁷ Braham, *A Holokauszt*, 23.

¹⁸ Jaross’s statement, December 20, 1945. See Karsai and Molnár, *Endre-Baký-Jaross*, 137.

¹⁹ Jaross’s statement, December 21, 1945. See Karsai and Molnár, *Endre-Baký-Jaross*, 170–72.

²⁰ Miklós Szinaí and László Szücs, eds., *Horthy Miklós titkos iratai* [The secret papers of Miklós Horthy] (Budapest, 1972), (hereafter: *HMTI*). Horthy Miklós leirata Sztójay Döme miniszterelnökhöz a zsidókérdés “megoldása” terén tett kormányintézkedések “túlzásainak enyhítése” tárgyában [Miklós Horthy’s transcript to Prime Minister Döme Sztójay on “moderating the excesses” of government measures in the field of a “settlement” of the Jewish question], doc. no. 85, 451.

²¹ *HMTI*, Pro Memoria a magyar zsidóság helyzetéről 1944. május 25-én [Memorandum on the situation of Hungarian Jewry, May 25, 1944], doc. no. 84, 444–49.

the Ministerial Council on June 21, 27, and 28—all of which were attended by Horthy and Sztójay.²² On July 6, 1944, Prime Minister Sztójay justified the halting of the deportations to Veessenmayer by citing the absence of any special laws against the Jews in Romania and the fact that thousands of Jews were free to live in peace in Slovakia.²³ In other words, those involved in the deportations were plainly stating in the summer of 1944 that Hungary had more than fulfilled German expectations.

Perhaps no particular evidence is required as to which solution would have been preferred by László Endre, László Baký, and Döme Sztójay. All three men were known to be staunch antisemites; given the chance, they would doubtless have deported Hungary's entire Jewish population. Indeed, they made no secret of their wishes, as shown by Endre's comments in an interview with *Esti Újság*, published on March 31, 1944.²⁴

Similarly, no separate proof is needed that the German special units, above all the Security Police and Gestapo leaders, who arrived with the occupying force, would have deported all the Jews from Hungary if they had been capable of doing so. In view of their limited numbers and their political functions, however, they simply did not have the capacity to accomplish this task. Moreover, on their dispatch to Hungary, there had been no mention of their being tasked with the marginalization and subsequent deportation of the country's Jewish population. Almost everything that happened in the subsequent period was the result of the close cooperation of Hungarian bodies.

How Much Did Miklós Horthy Know?

A key issue is what Horthy might have known about the fate intended for the Jews by the Nazi German leadership. We can only infer the extent to which Horthy was informed, as there is no record of an express admission

²² See Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*.

²³ György Ránki, Ervin Pamlényi, Loránt Tilkovszky, and Gyula Juhász, eds., *A Wilhelmstrasse és Magyarország. Német diplomáciai iratok Magyarországról 1933–1944* [The Wilhelmstrasse and Hungary: German diplomatic papers on Hungary, 1933–1944] (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1968) (hereafter: *Wilhelmstrasse*), doc. no. 691, Veessenmayer birodalmi megbízott távirata Ribbentrop külügyminiszternek, 1944. július 6. [Reich Plenipotentiary Veessenmeyer's telegram to Minister of Foreign Affairs Ribbentrop, July 6, 1944], 873–74.

²⁴ Kádár and Vági, *Hullarablás*, 108.

of his having known about the murder of people on an industrial scale at the German death camps under orders from the Nazi leadership. It should be added, however, that even in Hitler's case there is no documentary evidence: indeed, we can only infer that Hitler knew about the Holocaust and ordered it to happen. Still, whereas no serious historian has questioned Hitler's knowledge of the Holocaust, many people continue to assert that it was only in the summer of 1944 that Horthy—whose culpability is, of course, far less than Hitler's—realized that the purpose of deporting children and the elderly with those "fit for work" was *not* to keep families together.

At this point I should note that I do not subscribe to the positivist position that our view of an historical actor must be informed by concrete documentary evidence alone. On a whole series of issues, we have no direct proof of Horthy's knowledge, and yet there is no doubt that he had been informed of them. For instance, we have no specific data concerning Horthy's knowledge of László Endre's political views prior to 1944. Even so, we do know that as chief constable of Gödöllő, Endre had been a regular visitor to Horthy's mansion in the town. Further, Endre's political scandals were known throughout the country, while his father had been a representative in the lower and upper houses of Parliament and a personal acquaintance of Horthy. Thus we can exclude the possibility that Horthy was unaware who he was appointing as interior state secretary in late March 1944, particularly as Endre had clashed with Interior Minister Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer on several occasions. Horthy was evidently aware of Endre's political scandals, bluntly telling Veessenmayer that Endre was "insane."²⁵

In the first version of his memoirs,²⁶ Horthy stated that he had only received knowledge of the "Auschwitz Protocols"²⁷ in August 1944 (!). In later editions, he claimed to have been informed in early July 1944.²⁸

²⁵ *Wilhelmstrasse*, doc. no. 692, July 6, 1944, 875. Horthy's comment was rather odd, for he knew exactly that it would be provocative for Veessenmayer. Moreover he was the one who had signed the appointment of the "insane" Endre. Indeed, he sometimes met with Endre, chatting to him cheerfully.

²⁶ Miklós Horthy, *Emlékirataim* [My memoirs] (Buenos Aires, 1953), 259.

²⁷ Also known as the "Auschwitz Reports," is a collection of three eyewitness reports from 1943–44 about the mass murder that was taking place inside the Auschwitz concentration camp. The most important accounts were authored by Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler in late April, 1944.

²⁸ Miklós Horthy, *Emlékirataim* [My memoirs] (Budapest: Európa, 1990), 291; Ilona Edelsheim-Gyulay, *Becsület és kötelesség* [Honor and duty] (Budapest: Európa, 2000), 247–51.

It is no accident that his memory failed him. Ilona Edelsheim-Gyulai told me that she had been the first to deliver the protocols to the Hungarian leader, doing so in June. Verification of this, she said, was her father-in-law's surprise and consternation on examining the document: he had looked up and inquired, "And you actually believe this?"²⁹ In fact, Horthy's question implies that the text of the document might well have been familiar to him. Indeed, research by György Haraszti has revealed that several versions of the Auschwitz Protocols were received by Horthy through multiple channels beginning in May 1944.³⁰ Moreover, the Auschwitz Protocols were not the only source informing the Hungarian leader of the fate awaiting the deportees. There is evidence that, from April onwards, several petitions had reached him concerning the horrors of the deportations. On May 26, the cabinet office filed a lengthy memorandum on this subject.³¹ At the beginning of July, Horthy instructed Sztójay in writing to bring an end to the abuses surrounding the deportations and to provide opportunities for exemptions to be made. He also ordered the prime minister to remove the administration of Jewish matters from Baky and Endre.³²

Horthy's statements concerning his knowledge of events were remarkably inconsistent. In his memoirs, he made false claims concerning his knowledge of the Auschwitz Protocols, while also openly stating that he had been aware—already in February 1944—of what he had prevented. "The so-called German course"³³ [in the memoir Horthy referred in this way to the policy he himself had recommended] became attractive to the least degree because it included the notorious 'final solution' of the Jewish question and thus required that we contribute to the liquidation of 800,000 Jews. I myself attempted, in writing and verbally, to persuade and remind Hitler that a violent 'solution' would not only undermine law and order and was not only incompatible with morality and humanity, but would also lead to disturbances in production."³⁴ This passage in

²⁹ In the fall of 2012, I spoke with Ilona Edelsheim-Gyulai, widow of Horthy, in the presence of her son.

³⁰ György Haraszti, *Az "Auschwitzi jegyzőkönyv(ek)" habilitációs előadás tézisek* ["The Auschwitz Protocol(s)." Habilitation lecture theses] (2014), http://www.orzse.hu/phd/haraszti_habil_tezis.pdf (2014).

³¹ See *HMTI*, doc. no. 84, 445–49.

³² See *HMTI*, doc. no. 85, 450–54.

³³ Horthy understood this to mean the February 1944 memorandum of the right wing of the governing party (also known as the Government Party).

³⁴ See Horthy, *Emlékirataim*, 276.

his memoir renders it abundantly clear that, as early as February 1944, Horthy had understood that “the final solution” amounted to the physical destruction of the Jews.

Regarding the extent of Horthy’s knowledge of events, it is worth noting that, in spite of his age, the Hungarian leader still took an active interest in politics. Indeed, he was surprisingly well informed on certain issues: for instance, he knew the number of Jewish labor servicemen killed during battles at the Don River bend.³⁵ He must have suspected what the Nazis were planning to do with the Jews, as he had read the news reports on the fate of those Jews who were deported from Hungary during a police clampdown on “immigrants” in the summer of 1941. This is all the more true given that his most important confidants possessed remarkably accurate information on those events. In the following—without offering an exhaustive overview—I refer to three of Horthy’s close colleagues who plainly had knowledge of the Holocaust.

Vitéz Miklós Kozma de Leveld, as governor of the Carpathian region, constantly addressed the “settlement of the Jewish question.” In his region, more Jews were living than Hungarians. A decisive majority of them spoke Yiddish as their mother tongue, and many of them were stateless (lacking Hungarian citizenship). Kozma became an enthusiastic supporter of plans to deport such Jews, holding talks on the issue both with the Ministerial Council and—on June 21, 1941—with Horthy himself. He did all this even after having been informed, as early as November 1939, that “People are being killed in Poland.... The Jewish ghetto around Lublin partially solves the Jewish question; the destruction of people there is on such a scale.”³⁶ In October 1941, in a report sent to Margit Slachta, Kozma wrote: “On the other side of the border the same horrors are still going on, just as at the time of the Kamyanets-Podilsky pogrom. Those coming across the border say that in many places and without differentiation whole villages and towns are being destroyed through armed attacks, so that they might

³⁵ See the first Klessheim meeting between Horthy and Hitler. György Ránki, ed., *Hitler harvannyolc tárgyalása. Hitler Adolf tárgyalásai kelet-európai államférfiakkal* [Hitler’s sixty-eight meetings: Adolf Hitler’s negotiations with Eastern European statesmen] (Budapest: Magvető, 1983), vol. 2, 84.

³⁶ Magyar Országos Levéltár [National Archives of Hungary] (hereafter: MOL) K 429, Kozma-iratok, 3934, feljegyzés a lengyelországi útról 1939. 11.15–12.6. [Kozma papers, 3934, memorandum on the Poland visit, 15 November–6 December, 1939].

be rid of them.”³⁷ (The same claim was made in Kozma’s September report to the investigation department of the 8th District Gendarmerie, which also noted that “the shooting to death of Jews in the occupied territories is public knowledge.”³⁸)

Evidently, Hungarian interior minister Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer knew about all this, for in October 1942 he informed the head of the National Central Alien Control Office (KEOKH)³⁹ that he was ceasing to authorize deportations to Galicia because “there are reports that ... Jews deported to Galicia are, in most cases, being shot dead by the occupying authorities.”⁴⁰ Keresztes-Fischer must already have been aware of these circumstances, for he too was a recipient of the reports submitted by the gendarmerie and the border guard. Jews from Poland had been fleeing to Hungary since the summer of 1941, and they would continue to do so until 1944. As they crossed the border, most of them were caught and subjected to interrogation.

Prime Minister Kállay, Horthy’s confidant, must also have been aware of what was happening, in view of the reports he received from Hungary’s diplomats. In a report dated September 4, 1943, Lajos Bolla, Hungary’s consul general in Belgrade, even mentioned the introduction of a “gassing vehicle,” doing so without explaining the precise function of such a vehicle. This indicates that the writer of the letter assumed that the addressee, Minister of Foreign Affairs Jenő Ghyczy, would know exactly what was meant.⁴¹ In his memoirs, Kállay described how, on March 8, 1944, he had met with Samu Stern, warning him that “while the economic and social structures can survive and recover from a German occupation,

³⁷ Tamás Majsai, “Iratok a körösmezei deportálások történetéhez 1941” [Papers related to the history of the deportations from Körösmező in 1941], in *A Ráday Múzeum Évkönyve* [Yearbook of the Ráday Museum] (Budapest, 1986), 235. Jelentés a határon visszatérni próbáló deportáltak sorsáról és javaslat a helyzet normalizálására, 1941. október [Report on the fate of deportees who seek to return over the border and a proposal for normalizing the situation, October 1941].

³⁸ Cited in János Gellért and Ádám Gellért, “Menekülés a népirtás elől” [An escape from genocide], *Betekintő* 3 (2013): notes 10 and 72, http://www.betekinto.hu/en/2013_3_gellert_gellert.

³⁹ The National Central Alien Control Office (in Hungarian: Külföldiekkel Ellenőrző Országos Központi Hatóság, KEOKH) was established in 1930.

⁴⁰ MOL K491. 2. cs. Siménfalvy Nándor pro domója a belügyminiszterhez [Nándor Siménfalvy’s pro domo to the Minister of Interior]. Cited in Kinga Frojimovics, *Deportálás Galiciába a kamenyec-podolszkiji vérengzés után (1941–1942)* [Deportations to Galicia after the Kamianets-Podilskyi massacre], manuscript.

⁴¹ Karsai, *Holokausz*, 200.

they will annihilate every single Jew.”⁴² There can be no doubt that he meant this literally, as Samu Stern also noted: “I knew about the things they had done in every occupied country in Europe and I knew that wherever they went, they committed a long series of murders and robberies.... I knew their customs, their deeds, and their frightful reputation.”⁴³

As Dávid Turbucz and Ádám Gellért have shown,⁴⁴ when Horthy met Hitler he must have realized that the destruction of Jews was occurring at the express orders of the highest German leadership. At the meeting Hitler reproached Horthy for the situation in Hungary, in response to which Horthy “had to admit blushingly that he had sent 36,000 Jews to the front in the labor service battalions, most of whom had likely been killed in the course of the Russian advance.”⁴⁵ When Horthy inquired as to what he should do with the Jews because he had already done everything he could and it was not possible to kill them or destroy them by other means, Hitler responded that the concentration camps represented the solution rather than killing them. The next day, when the topic was discussed once more, Ribbentrop openly stated that the Jews would have to be killed or put in concentration camps. Horthy understood what was expected of him, as the draft of his letter to Hitler of May 7, 1943, reveals: “A further reproach of your Excellency was that in the matter of the extermination of the Jews the government has not proceed so thoroughly as has been the case in Germany.” The draft was made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and although Horthy left this sentence out in the final version of the letter, it is evident that he did so for tactical reasons alone, for in the same letter he promised that “as soon as the conditions [for the deportation of the Jews] are in place, we will execute the plan.” Still, we know from Horthy’s statements at Klessheim and from other sources that, at the time, he had no intention whatsoever of establishing the conditions for the deportations and that he did his utmost to hinder progress in this field until the German occupation of Hungary.

⁴² Miklós Kállay, *Magyarország miniszterelnöke voltam 1942–1944* [I was Hungary’s prime minister, 1942–1944] (Budapest: Európa, 1991), vol. 2, 170.

⁴³ Mária Schmidt, *Kollaboráció vagy kooperáció? A budapesti zsidó tanács* [Collaboration or cooperation? The Budapest Jewish Council] (Budapest: Minerva, 1990), 59.

⁴⁴ Ádám Gellért and Dávid Turbucz, “Egy elmaradt felelősségre vonás margójára. Horthy Miklós Nürnbergben” [For the margins of a missing indictment. Miklós Horthy in Nuremberg], *Betekintő* 4 (2012), http://www.betekinto.hu/sites/default/files/2012_4_gellert_turbucz.pdf.

⁴⁵ See note no. 36.

Based on the aforementioned documents and records, it may be stated that Horthy knew what was meant by a “settlement of the Jewish question” on the German model. Consequently, attempts to relativize Horthy’s responsibility by arguing that he received the Auschwitz Protocols only in May or June 1944 are pointless.⁴⁶ His many slips of the tongue, when he speaks of “slaughter” and “extermination,”⁴⁷ make it very clear that he was fully aware of what was meant by the “settlement of the Jewish question.” Jusztiáni Serédi, who had less information than Horthy, already knew on May 17, 1944, that the deportations meant—in the rather demure wording of a cardinal—that people were losing their lives “without a court procedure.” Nor is it incidental that at the Klessheim meeting the “unresolved status of the Jewish question” had been just one of Hitler’s complaints. Today, historians are agreed that this one issue would not have been enough to provoke Germany’s occupation of Hungary.⁴⁸

In this connection, it is worth analyzing what was said at the March 19 meeting of the Crown Council. Minutes of the meeting have survived in two versions. According to the “official” version, a memorandum compiled by István Bárczy, Horthy stated, in his report on the meeting in Klessheim, the following: “A further accusation has been made, namely that Hungary is doing nothing in respect of the Jewish question and is unwilling to make a reckoning with its large Hungarian Jewish community.”⁴⁹ A second version states that “Hitler also complained that Hungary is failing to take the necessary steps. Our transgression is, therefore, that I have failed to fulfill Hitler’s wishes and have refused to allow the massacre of the Jews.”⁵⁰ The two versions do not differ significantly from each other: the words “reckoning” and “massacre” both indicated that Horthy was aware, if only in

⁴⁶ This is claimed primarily by Sándor Szakály. See Csaba Tóth, “Szakály Sándor: ‘A történetfelfogás folyamatosan alakul, változik,’” *Budapest Beacon*, July 18, 2014, http://hu.budapestbeacon.com/kiemelt-cikkek/szakaly-sandor-tortenetfelfogas-folyamatosan-alakul-valtozik/?utm_source=mandiner&utm_medium=link&utm_campaign=mandiner_201407. Sadly, Szakály has not even attempted to prove his claim, arguing that the documents produced with a view to determining the issue are irrelevant.

⁴⁷ See *HMTI*, Horthy Miklós levéltervezete Adolf Hitlernek, 1943. május 7 [Miklós Horthy’s draft letter to Adolf Hitler, May 7, 1943], 398.

⁴⁸ Braham, *A Holocaust*, 23.

⁴⁹ *HMTI*, 425.

⁵⁰ The text, based on what appeared in the August 17, 1945, edition of the newspaper *Demokrácia*, was published by Ilona Benoschofsky and Elek Karsai in volume 1 of *Vádirat a náciizmus ellen* [Indictment against Nazism] (Budapest, 1958), 17. The newspaper *Demokrácia* did not publish the source of the text.

broad terms, of Hitler's goals. In other words, Horthy could not have been in any doubt about Nazi Germany's plans for the Jews. He did not necessarily know about the technical methods employed to destroy the Jews, but he must have been aware that the German leadership was seeking the physical destruction of the Jews.

On April 17, 1944, Horthy, who claimed later on to have known nothing at this point, held talks with László Endre, and he also received László Baky. He approved the plan to deport the Jews, saying that the non-assimilated Jews could be taken without further ado. In his postwar statement to the People's Tribunal, Baky claimed that Horthy had said the following: "They want to take the Jews out of the country. I hate the Galician communist Jews, out of the country with them, out, out! But you, Baky, must realize that the Chorins and the Vidas are just as good Hungarians as you or me. Their deportation cannot even be countenanced."⁵¹ Baky possibly made this claim in order to justify his own behavior. Whatever the case may be, his claim was clearly not without foundation, for Horthy had already demonstrated his own selective antisemitism in public.⁵² In the summer of 1944, he even identified the groups who were to be deported. He openly told Budapest's new mayor, Farkas Ákos Dorogi, that however the war might end "all those of alien ancestry, whether Jewish, Romanian, Serbian or German, would have to leave the country, so that Hungarians might return to being their own masters in the country."⁵³ It is worth noting that both Germans and Jews were present on the list. Horthy was so serious about expelling the Germans that during his internment in the aftermath of war he wrote to George VI of England, in a letter dated March 19, 1945, asking for the king's support for the Germans' resettlement outside Hungary.⁵⁴ In summary, while Horthy did not merely ask Baky to save a few dozen of his Jewish friends, he certainly approved the deportation of those Jews deemed nonassimilated—leaving it to a notorious antisemite to decide who should be included in that group.

Endre and Baky were not the only ones who witnessed Horthy consenting to the deportation of Jews. Another secondhand witness was the

⁵¹ László Baky's statement, December 19, 1945. See Karsai and Molnár, *Endre-Baky-faross*, 105.

⁵² Illustrative examples of this are given in Dávid Turbucz, "Horthy Miklós antiszemizmusa."

⁵³ *Wilhelmstrasse*, doc. no. 667, 849.

⁵⁴ Éva H. Haraszti, ed., *Horthy Miklós—dokumentumok tükrében* [Miklós Horthy—As reflected in the documents] (Budapest: Balassi, 1993), 15.

Calvinist bishop László Ravasz. On April 26 or 27, the bishop contacted Horthy in order to protest against the inhumane nature of the deportations. As the bishop's memorandum shows, Horthy told him that as the Germans "were demanding a large number of labor servicemen ... several hundred thousand Jews would be sent out of the country, but not a strand of their hair would be harmed."⁵⁵ In his witness statement to the People's Tribunal, Ravasz also noted that Horthy had informed him that "their families would also be deported so that they could remain together and so that the nation would not have to keep their families while the fathers were earning money abroad."⁵⁶

Who Did the Germans Want to Deport (from Hungary) and Why?

While the question may seem odd at first, we are justified in posing it for several reasons. Although Hitler's plan was that all Jews should be deported, several questions arise in respect of the practical implementation of the plan. Many different options were open to the German side. Indeed, the Nazi German authorities had to decide who was to be deported first, how many people were to be transported at any one time, where the deportees were to be taken, and what fate should await those who were fit or unfit for work. The Germans might have opted to limit the deportations to Jews living in the military operational area in the Carpathian region (at the time the front lay 30 kilometers to the north), or to Jews who were fit for work, or to Jews living outside Budapest. If the deportees had been limited to people who were fit for work, then Auschwitz would have been superfluous, as there would have been no need to select and then murder Jews unfit for work. Ambiguity also surrounded the minimum number of deportees and the measures to be taken in the event of the deportations being halted or prevented.

There is every indication that the decisions were influenced by the need in Germany for forced laborers. The two countries had held talks on this subject on many occasions even prior to the occupation.⁵⁷ Forced

⁵⁵ Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*.

⁵⁶ László Ravasz's statement, December 29, 1945. See Karsai and Molnár, *Endre-Baky-ŋaross*, 343–45, and, confirming this account, László Baky's last words before his execution, 453.

⁵⁷ Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*.

laborers evidently meant more than the labor servicemen alone, rather, anyone who had been declared fit for work. The sources uniformly indicate—even though no mention of it was made at the Crown Council on March 19, 1944—that Horthy consented at Klessheim to the deportation to Germany of “Jewish forced laborers.” This was, at any rate, the unanimous claim of Veessenmayer, Endre, Baky, and László Ravasz. A Hungarian government communiqué dated June 1944 also mentions the “redeployment of the Jewish labor force.”⁵⁸

On April 7, 1944, Hitler announced that Germany needed 100,000 Hungarian forced laborers to work on its fighter plane program in the subterranean factories that were also manufacturing the wonder-weapons (*Wunderwaffen*). On April 17, he spoke once again of the large-scale deployment of Hungarian Jewish labor. Then, on April 19, at a meeting of government ministers, mention was made of 500,000 forced laborers to be “imported” from Hungary.⁵⁹ This latter figure was totally unrealistic, given that the total Hungarian Jewish population was 825,000. Several times during this period, Hitler cited similarly unrealistic figures, tacitly acknowledging that the labor shortage was the main weakness of Germany’s war economy.

It was obvious from the outset that the authorities would seek, for various reasons, to employ Hungarian Jewish labor in closed groups housed at the concentration camps. This is how it had been in the past. In László Karsai’s view, utilization of such labor was not the primary consideration of the Germans. The evidence for this, according to Karsai, is that when, on April 13, 1944, the Hungarian government offered to supply 50,000 labor servicemen to Germany, Kaltenbrunner declared at the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the men could only be employed in closed camps, whereupon the whole idea was put on ice.⁶⁰ In my opinion, this argument does not stand, firstly because the Jews deported from Hungary between May and July 1944 were initially taken, without exception, to Auschwitz. And on arrival in Auschwitz those fit for work were selected and then put to work in closed camps. In other words, the plan was implemented as Kaltenbrunner had foreseen, with the only difference being that in the meantime the decision had been taken

⁵⁸ *HMTI*, doc. no. 81, 419–31; Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*.

⁵⁹ See Götz Aly and Christian Gerlach, *Das letzte Kapitel. Der Mord an den ungarischen Juden*. (Stuttgart and Munich, 2002), 159 and 168–69. *Wilhelmstrasse*, 832.

⁶⁰ Karsai, “A végső döntésképtelenség,” 189.

at the Hungarian Ministry of Defense to send civilians rather than labor servicemen to Auschwitz. There has been a tendency among some historians to portray this decision as an attempt to save lives, which is erroneous given that the number of Holocaust survivors would obviously have been greater if the labor servicemen had indeed been sent to Auschwitz and the elderly and the young kept at home. Unfortunately no documents have surfaced that might reveal the factors that lay behind this decision, and so we can only speculate.⁶¹ It is a fact, at any rate, that even the allegedly super-powerful Eichmann had no choice but to accept the decision. The Hungarian ministry even managed to ensure that call-up papers were delivered to men in the ghettos.⁶² In view of these circumstances, the most likely scenario is that senior military officers with Arrow Cross sympathies acted in line with Ferenc Szálasi's intent, forming an odd alliance with others who were driven by humane considerations or by a desire to fulfill Horthy's will. Here one should note that Szálasi had condemned the deportations for being a waste of valuable Hungarian labor. His actual words were as follows: "It seems the government has no idea what to do with the Jews. Yet major and urgent works need to be undertaken." Szálasi expressed regret that "we are letting go of 400,000 individuals who are fit for ten hours of work daily. This amounts to the loss of four million labor hours per day." He then stated: "If the government, in its inertia, is unable to solve the Jewish question, then it should go. We will make sure the Jews are put to work—usefully and until their nails break, because with us those who don't want to work will die!"⁶³ Szálasi's words seem to have had an effect, for on June 7, 1944, the Ministry of Defense ordered that the labor

⁶¹ Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*. Braham suggests that it was then that the competent staff at the Ministry of Defense realized what the "final solution" really meant, and that this motivated them. This possibility, however, can be excluded, for from 1942 the Hungarian Ministry of Defense must have had knowledge, by way of the occupying forces, of the essence of the Holocaust.

⁶² Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*. Braham mentions the conference on May 1, 1944, at which the decision was taken with the involvement of the German side (Organisation Todt, HSSPF, and Eichmann's delegate) and despite protests from Eichmann.

⁶³ MOL-K814-Mf-X-7076-16.718-419. Szálasi Ferenc válasza a Hűség Házában feltett kérdésre, 1944. június 2. [Ferenc Szálasi's response to a question at the House of Loyalty on June 2, 1944]. In relation to the Sztójay government's policy toward the Jews, Gábor Vajna stated (while detained by the police's Political Department) the following: "the senseless deportation of the Jews." BFL-XXV-1-a-293/1946-7317, December 19, 1945. Thanks to László Karsai for the data.

servicemen should be placed under guard in prisoner-of-war camps with barbed-wire fences.⁶⁴

Eichmann reiterated his ideas concerning the use of labor during his time as an émigré in Argentina and, subsequently, as a prisoner in Israel. Eichmann met with László Endre for the first time on March 29, just ten days after his arrival in Hungary. The two men agreed that, in line with Himmler's wishes, the country's Jews would be deported to Auschwitz, starting in the east and then moving westward. However, persons aged over 60 and people unfit for work would be left out of this scheme.⁶⁵ This indicates that Eichmann's original plan differed from what then actually happened. True, the deportations did start in the east and then proceed westward. On the other hand, however, a majority of the deportees were elderly and/or unfit for work, as the Royal Hungarian Army had drafted Jewish men fit for work into the labor service battalions.

Evidence Contradicting the Existence of a "Master Plan" with Regard to the Organization and Deployment of the German Occupation and Security Forces

The size of the German security force sent to Hungary, and of Eichmann's team as it was called, is proof in itself of the tasks which the German leadership intended it to perform. In countries where the willing cooperation of the local administration could not be counted upon, the German deportation experts were assisted by a significant German armed force. In Hungary, however, Eichmann's team included not even a single German police battalion. Without citing any sources, László Karsai put the size of Eichmann's force at 200–300 men. Braham estimated the force at 150–200 men, while Otto Winkelmann, who served as Höhere SS und Polizeiführer (HSSPF—higher SS and police leader) in Hungary, estimated the size of the special force under his command, which included units of the Sicherheitsdienst (SD), the SS intelligence service, and the Ordnungspolizei (Orpo), at 600 men.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ The command is quoted in Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*. Here too, Braham attributes the measure to a desire to rescue people, and yet a wire fence would probably not have stopped the Germans if they had really wanted to drive the Jews out.

⁶⁵ The documents are cited in David Cesarani, *Adolf Eichmann. Bürokrat und Massenmörder* (Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 2004), 237.

⁶⁶ Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*.

The SD's Budapest telephone book⁶⁷ and the findings of research on Eichmann and his team indicate that the force comprised no more than 65 people, including chauffeurs and secretaries.⁶⁸

We know the names of the staff of the German authorities, almost down to the last junior officer. Edmund Veessenmayer, Reich plenipotentiary in Hungary, commanded a team limited to the staff of the German embassy, who had no administrative and governmental responsibilities. (Hence, Braham was wrong to write that "a huge and fervent team assisted Veessenmayer"—huge was by any measure an exaggeration.)⁶⁹ Even if Veessenmayer had wanted to do so, he was not in a position to act in the same way as the German top dogs in Denmark, Italy or Greece. Similarly to Eichmann, Veessenmayer was limited to persuading the Hungarian authorities to undertake the measures he had "recommended." This remained true even after the deployment of several additional staff to the embassy in late March, including Theodor Grelle, who assisted Veessenmayer in his position as a "Jew consultant." Everyone knew that behind Veessenmayer's recommendations lay Hitler's demands. Indeed, the aim of the German occupation was evidently to fulfill Hitler's wishes without the need for a significant German engagement. This was so not only in Hungary but also in Europe's other occupied countries. The exceptions to this rule were those countries which had been designated as operational areas or as German *Lebensraum* and which lacked fully fledged local public administrations. There were, however, striking differences between the various countries, reflecting the extent of their willingness to cooperate. Norway, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, and Italy reacted differently to the German demands, which were virtually the same in every case. The occupation policy pursued by the Germans in the various countries reflected such differences.

⁶⁷ The authority responsible for storage of the Stasi papers in Berlin (Die Behörde für die Aufbewahrung der Stasiunterlagen Berlin, BStU). MfS HA IX/11, ZR 920 A.51. Telefonverzeichnis HSSPF Budapest, KdS Budapest, Sondereinsatzkommando Budapest.

⁶⁸ Aly and Gerlach, *Das letzte Kapitel*, 128. Aly and Gerlach refer to a statement made by the personnel chief of the Hungarian group of the Gestapo on July 27, 1963. See also Szabolcs Szita, *A Gestapo tevékenysége Magyarországon 1939–1945* [The actions of the Gestapo in Hungary, 1939–1945] (Budapest: Corvina, 2014), 92.

⁶⁹ Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*. The exact number of staff at the German embassy is unknown, but it is unlikely to have been more than fifty. (In 2014, the Federal Republic of Germany's embassy in Hungary had roughly sixty staff members.)

At the very beginning of the occupation, the Gestapo grossly violated Hungary's sovereignty by arresting Hungarian citizens, including seventeen members of the lower house of parliament and ten members of the upper house. From April, however, such measures were undertaken in conjunction with the Hungarian police force.⁷⁰

The HSSPF in Hungary was SS-Obergruppenführer Otto Winkelmann, who was also a general of the Waffen-SS. The three Waffen-SS divisions that formed the major part of the German "occupation" force from May 1944—a force that included Hungarians of German ethnicity—were subordinated to Winkelmann in a formal rather than an operational sense. We can infer from this the recruitment difficulties faced by the German armed forces. The soldiers charged with keeping the Hungarian authorities in line had first to be drafted and trained with the assistance of the Hungarian Gendarmerie. It is a strange paradox that the German "occupation forces" were formed with Hungarian assistance and through the recruitment of Hungarian citizens. This, at least, was the situation from the end of April 1944 when most regular German troops were withdrawn from Hungary. On March 17, 1944, almost 120,000 German soldiers had marched into Hungary. The size of the occupation force fell to 70,000 men in April, to 57,300 in May, and to 46,507 in June. If we subtract from this number the soldiers who, in the meantime, had been forcibly drafted in Hungary, then the total number of German citizens in the occupying force was less than 20,000.⁷¹ Their number is reduced even further if we subtract the soldiers of the replacement units of the 11th Army (Wehrmacht), who had been redeployed to the Carpathian region in view of the situation on the front. If we look at the heavy weapons available to the soldiers, we see that, from May onwards, the German occupation force did not have even a single tank or self-propelled gun, with the exception of several tanks and guns that had been used by the three SS cavalry units for training purposes. In contrast, even after June, the Hungarian army retained more than 200 tanks and self-propelled guns in the hinterland. The German occupation force was barely visible in Hungary. To the east of the River Tisza and in Northern Transylvania and the Carpathian region, there were no German units at all, with the exception of a few dozen men belonging

⁷⁰ See Szita, *A Gestapo tevékenysége*, 102–9.

⁷¹ For the number of German forces, see Aly and Gerlach, *Das letzte Kapitel*, 124–25.

to the KdS (Kommando der Sicherheitspolizei—the security police) and the Ordnungspolizei (public security police). Most of the German soldiers were accommodated at large camps, and, after May 1944, barely any German soldiers were to be seen on the streets of Hungary's towns and villages. Field Marshal Maximilian von Weichs, commander of the German Wehrmacht occupation forces, felt himself to be superfluous. Indeed, on April 24, he handed over his tasks to Lieutenant General Hans Greiffenberg, who was the German military attaché in Budapest. All this proves that the Wehrmacht did not consider the occupation of Hungary a particularly difficult assignment.

Table 1: German Occupation Units Stationed in Hungary in 1944

Formation	Date of withdrawal
69th Army	April 2–4, 1944
367th Infantry Division	March 29, 1944
100th Jäger [Hunter] Division	March 29, 1944
1st Mountain Division	April 2, 1944
78th Army	April 2, 1944
Brandenburg Regiment	April 2, 1944
Armored Tank Division	May 1, 1944
58th Panzer Corps	April 8, 1944
18th Waffen-SS Grenadier Division (under establishment) ⁷³	In Hungary throughout
8th Waffen-SS Cavalry Division ⁷⁴	In Hungary throughout

Subordinated to Winkelmann were his political advisor Ernst Kienast as well as Wilhelm Höttl, who in all likelihood was the SD intelligence operative in Hungary. The total number of staff was no more than twenty-five.⁷² The following organizational units were directly subordinated to Winkelmann:

⁷² Igor-Phillip Matic, *Edmund Veessenmayer. Agent und Diplomat der nationalsozialistischen Expansionspolitik* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2002), 231.

- SS Economic Department (Dr. Bobermin, Solledner)
- SS Auxiliary Military Command
- SS Provisions Command (Prescher)
- SS Training Command (Heerman, Dietz)
- SS Equipment Command (Becher)
- Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle (Dr. Weibgen)
- VI/G Department (SD Intelligence, Wilhelm Höttl)
- 7th Department (collation, use and dissemination of ideological material)

In addition to the above, the security police, known as Einsatzgruppe G, were also subordinated to Winkelmann. Einsatzgruppe G comprised seven Einsatzkommandos, with thirty-three men in the Budapest group,⁷³ as well as eight branch offices of the Ordnungspolizei. The latter were responsible in part for guarding the trains of deportees from Kassa (Košice) to Auschwitz. On the first part of the journey (i.e. as far as Kassa/Košice) the Hungarian gendarmerie guarded the trains. Alongside the Ordnungspolizei, there were, on July 15, 1944, 595 men serving in Hungary in eight military police squadrons.⁷⁴

Finally, mention should also be made of Eichmann's team. Given that Eichmann's team had to establish seven branch offices outside Budapest, it is obvious that the number of staff (sixty-five, as noted at the beginning of the chapter) sufficed only for a consultative role and for the selection, from the ghettos, of those Jews of foreign citizenship whose deportation the RSHA (Reichssicherheitshauptamt) had prohibited.⁷⁵ The armed forces at Winkelmann's immediate disposal in Budapest were an SS-Guard Battalion and a unit of the Ordnungspolizei.⁷⁶ According to a report compiled in the summer of 1944, the 304th Police Company, a spe-

⁷³ In an interview with Péter Bokor, Alfred Trenker, the head of the Budapest KdS, stated that he had been in charge of thirty-two subordinates. The full number could not have been more than fifty, given that the KdS command in Budapest also made up the central staff numbers. See Péter Bokor, *Végjáték a Duna mentén. Interjúk egy filmsorozathoz* [Endgame along the Danube: Interviews for a film series] (Budapest: RTV-Minerva-Kossuth, 1982), 84.

⁷⁴ Bundesarchiv Berlin R 19 451, *Stärkemeldung der Ordnungspolizei*, Stand 15. 7. 1944.

⁷⁵ The Jewish citizens of the neutral countries, as well as British and American Jews, were exempted from deportation, with the latter being interned in special camps.

⁷⁶ BSTU MfS HA IX/11, ZR 920 A.51. Telefonverzeichnis HSSPF Budapest, KdS Budapest, Sondereinsatzkommando Budapest.

cial-purpose police unit (comprising the 21/III Police Battalion and half of a police guard battalion), as well as a camp guard squad, were stationed in Budapest. In addition, the 12/II SS-Police Battalion was stationed in Miskolc and the 20/II SS-Police Battalion in Barcs.⁷⁷ These units, however, took no part—or only a very small part—in measures employed against the Jews.⁷⁸ The total number of men subordinated to the HSSPF, including civilian employees, the SS Military Hospital staff, and members of the river police and all other units, was 2,097 in Budapest.⁷⁹ This force was supplemented by the two latterly mentioned SS police battalions with 800 men. It would seem the Germans had no other forces at their disposal in Hungary, as historians of the German police forces have found nothing to suggest that they were active in Hungary at this time. The 5th SS Police Regiment was the only such regiment to participate in the occupation of Hungary, but all its units had been withdrawn from Hungary by May 15, 1944. Thus, after this date, the German security forces had around 3,000 men in Hungary overall.

A Case History Contradicting Both the “Master Plan” and the Complete Loss of Hungarian Sovereignty

On several occasions, Veesenmayer mentioned how insignificant his role had been in Hungary. For example, at the trial of Endre, Baky, and Jaross, he even denied that “settlement of the Jewish question” had been one of his “responsibilities.”⁸⁰ In 1962, in an interview with the historian Péter Gosztonyi, who had emigrated from Hungary to Switzerland, Veesen-

⁷⁷ Bundesarchiv Berlin R 10–451/ 32–33 Übersicht über Kräfte der Ordnungspolizei und ihren Einsatz, Stand 15. Juli 1944.

⁷⁸ The only piece of data I have found, pertains to the Fifth and Seventh companies of 5/II. SS-Police Battalion. According to the war diary of the battalion, these companies provided, for a short period, the guards in the Siklós and Barcs ghettos, with ten-man task forces. See Wolfgang Curilla, *Der Judenmord in Polen und die deutsche Ordnungspolizei* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2011), 281–82.

⁷⁹ National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) T 77 R1142 F000797–798. Szabolcs Szita refers to it erroneously as Einsatzgruppe “F”. He puts the total force at 800 persons (Szita, *A Gestapo tevékenysége*, 80).

⁸⁰ Veesenmayer’s hearing, December 21, 1945. See Karsai and Molnár, *Endre–Baky–Jaross*, 193.

mayer noted “modestly” that “I could only influence the direction of events.”⁸¹ Veessenmayer gravely misrepresented his role, but he did so not entirely without justification, for we know of a small number of occasions when Veessenmayer did fail to make his influence felt. For example, shortly after the German invasion, Horthy refused to accept several of Veessenmayer’s candidates for posts as government ministers.⁸² Indeed, despite Veessenmayer’s open threats, Horthy repeatedly refused to appoint Nazi Germany’s preferred prime ministerial candidate, Béla Imrédy. On July 21, Veessenmayer requested Sztójay and Horthy to dismiss Imre Ruskiczay-Rüdiger from his post as permanent deputy minister of war.⁸³ When the Hungarian government failed to act, Veessenmayer repeated his request in stronger terms. Although Horthy then pledged to meet the request, the deputy minister nevertheless remained in his post until the Arrow Cross takeover.⁸⁴ István Antal, whose dismissal Veessenmayer called for as early as March 30,⁸⁵ also remained in his post. Further, when Veessenmayer authorized the release by the Gestapo of the three detained Hungarian military officers—Colonel General Ferenc Szombathelyi and Chief of General Staff colonels Gyula Kádár and István Újszászy—he insisted that the Hungarian authorities should continue to keep the men in detention. In fact, however, the Hungarian authorities released all three of them. In July 1944, Horthy refused—in defiance of Veessenmayer’s express request—to send 20,000 antiaircraft auxiliaries and horse grooms to the Third Reich. In most instances, the German occupiers were ultimately able to achieve their objectives after lengthy negotiations, but sometimes this was not, or was only partly, the case.

⁸¹ Péter Gosztonyi, *Légiveszély, Budapest! Szemelvények Magyarország második világháborús történetéből (1938–1945)* [Air raid, Budapest! Excerpts from the history of Hungary in World War II (1938–1945)] (Budapest: Népszava, 1989), 87.

⁸² Veessenmayer sought to have Jenő Ruskay appointed as minister of defense and he also demanded that Bárdossy be given a ministerial post. (Neither of them were given government posts.) Meanwhile, he wanted Baký or Endre to be appointed as minister of the interior (but they only got posts as state secretaries). Veessenmayer was also insistent that Lajos Csátay should be dismissed as minister of defense, but he could not achieve this either. See Matic, *Edmund Veessenmayer*, 225–27.

⁸³ *Wilhelmstrasse*, doc. no. 687, 870–871; doc. no. 705, 892–893.

⁸⁴ *Wilhelmstrasse*, doc. no. 687, and Sándor Szakály, *A magyar katonai felső vezetés 1938–1945. Lexikon és adattár* [The Hungarian senior military leadership, 1938–1945: Lexicon and data archive] (Budapest: Ister, 2003), 295.

⁸⁵ *Wilhelmstrasse*, doc. no. 614, 807.

The main defendants in the postwar trials held by the people's tribunals made no attempt to cite the full loss of Hungary's sovereignty as part of their defense, even though such a plea might have greatly diminished their own responsibility/culpability. Andor Jaross openly contradicted the court when he was accused of having slavishly implemented German demands. According to Jaross, sovereignty in the absolute sense is enjoyed "only by the great powers, but they too must give consideration to each other's interests." He claimed to have served as interior minister for the sake of rescuing the principle of sovereignty.⁸⁶ Neither he, nor the court, noticed that this statement was actually an act of self-incrimination, for if a degree of sovereignty had been retained by Hungary, then as its interior minister Jaross would not have been obliged to fulfill German demands.

In connection with the deportations, the People's Tribunal asked Veesenmayer what would have happened if the Hungarian government had refused to implement the anti-Jewish measures. Veesenmayer responded that "they would not have been implemented. For when Horthy announced that they would not continue [implementing the measures], nothing happened at all.... [From the German side] there were certainly attempts to exert pressure, but [we] would not have had the instruments of power needed to undertake this. ... The occupation lasted only a short while, and the withdrawal of the divisions began only a few days after the troops marched into the country. Further, this would have been a police task rather than a responsibility of the military, and yet there were only a very small number of such [police] forces available."⁸⁷

Under cross-examination, Veesenmayer acknowledged merely that the German authorities would have employed forceful means in the case of deportations from "border regions," that is, from the Carpathian region, Transylvania, and the "Délvidék" (southern region). He did not say what these measures would have been. This also shows that the course of events was not inevitable. For the plans to be implemented, the active participation of the Hungarian side was also required.

Some have cited as proof of the existence of a deportation "master plan" the fact that, in the first half of March 1944, Eichmann summoned so-called "*Entjudung* consultants" to Mauthausen. Those attending the meeting included Theodor Dannecker, Dieter Wisliceny, Hermann

⁸⁶ Andor Jaross's hearing, December 20, 1945. See Karsai and Molnár, *Endre-Baky-Jaross*, 134.

⁸⁷ Karsai and Molnár, *Endre-Baky-Jaross*, 194.

Krumei, Siegfried Seydl, Franz Abromeit, Arthur Burger, and Franz Novak.⁸⁸ Still, there is no specific information about the subject of their negotiations. Thus, Braham's assertion that this was when the decision was taken "on the plan for a deportation and extermination program" is of questionable validity.⁸⁹ Even so, it is a fact that, in addition to Eichmann's Sondereinsatzkommando (a force tasked with Hungary's "*Entjudung*"), the Gestapo and SD forces that were to be sent to Hungary were also assembled in Mauthausen.⁹⁰ All these forces then underwent "preparation" for the special circumstance prevailing in Hungary, and such training was particularly necessary given that Hungary was to be treated as an apparently independent country. Still, Kaltenbrunner told the assembled men that "the form [of the occupation] has yet to be determined—that is, whether it should be an overt military occupation or something more amicable."⁹¹ At Mauthausen, therefore, even those forces that were shortly to participate in the occupation did not know exactly what they would be expected to do. True, Kaltenbrunner spent the first three days of the occupation in Hungary, but there were many reasons for him to do so. To mention just one: Soviet troops were already advancing on the Hungarian border in the east. There is no hard evidence that Kaltenbrunner made known, at this time, an exact (!) timetable for the introduction of the yellow star, the placement of the Jews in ghettos and their subsequent deportation to Auschwitz—this is merely conjecture on the part of László Karsai.⁹² Evidently, it is more than likely that Kaltenbrunner discussed with Sztójay in general terms various aspects of the "settlement of the Jewish question," but he could not have set a "timetable" for action, if for no other reason than that he lacked the required forces. Everything depended on the Hungarian side's willingness to implement the plan.

Not only Kaltenbrunner, but also Himmler spent—incognito—a day and a half in Hungary, at some point between March 20 and March 24, 1944. We may infer from this that at the time even senior Nazi leaders were unsure about the extent to which Hungarian sovereignty should be considered a relevant factor.⁹³ If Hungarian sovereignty had been irrelevant, then the two men would not have needed to remain incognito; they

⁸⁸ For a reference to this, see Karsai, "A végső döntésképtelenség," 188.

⁸⁹ Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*.

⁹⁰ See Péter Gosztonyi's interview with Alfred Trenker (Gosztonyi, *Légiveszély*, 99).

⁹¹ Alfred Trenker's words (Bokor, *Végjáték*, 86).

⁹² Karsai, "A végső döntésképtelenség," 190.

⁹³ Bokor, *Végjáték*, 88.

could simply have made an appearance, as they did in the other occupied territories in the east, where there was no question as to the prerogatives of Himmler and the RSHA. On the question of Hungarian sovereignty, the OKW (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, the supreme command of the German armed forces), Ribbentrop, Veessenmayer, and Field Marshal von Weichs had radically different views, but ultimately those who favored cooperation with the Hungarian authorities prevailed. A final decision on how to treat Hungary was taken on March 28, at a meeting convened by Hitler at his headquarters near Berchtesgaden, which was attended by Veessenmayer, von Weichs, Himmler, and others.⁹⁴ At this meeting it was decided that the semblance of Hungarian sovereignty should be maintained at all costs.⁹⁵

We know of only one decree that may seem—at first sight—to be the first phase in a “master plan.” The decree in question—Decree no. 6163/1944 BM—was drafted on April 4, 1944, and promulgated by the Hungarian Ministry of the Interior three days later. It was one of a very small number of decrees where the first draft was prepared by the Germans (Eichmann), with the draft then being submitted to the competent Hungarian officials (in this case, to László Endre) for revision. The wording of the decree began as follows: “The Royal Hungarian Government will shortly cleanse the country of the Jews.” The decree then provided for the ghettoization of the Jews in Hungary, commencing in the northeast of the country and proceeding towards the southwest based on the gendarmerie districts but with the capital city being ghettoized last. Under the terms of the decree, the German security police (RSHA) were merely to have advisory powers, and the decree also stipulated what was to happen to the property of Jews placed in ghettos. In this regard, the decree’s detailed provisions, including a requirement for personal body searches, must have been proposed by the Hungarian side, for the Germans would doubtless have been pleased if the Jews had arrived in Auschwitz with gold and diamonds concealed in their clothing. The decree did not specify which persons were to be classed as Jews or how the costs of ghettoization and deportation were to be covered. Moreover, in a crucial matter, the authorities proceeded in a manner that contradicted the provisions of the decree, as the following shows. Under the decree, valuable items belonging to Jews were supposed to be surrendered to the competent regional branches of

⁹⁴ The diary of Field Marshal Maximilian von Weichs (Gosztonyi, *Légiveszély*, 116).

⁹⁵ Matic, *Edmund Veessenmayer*, 229.

the National Bank of Hungary. Indeed, in the course of April, László Bakó issued a statement reiterating the terms of the decree to a wider group. Even so, the National Bank of Hungary managed, without much effort, to avoid taking part in the organized robbery of the Jewish populace: in a telegram sent to all branches of the National Bank, Superintendent Gusztáv Knirsch prohibited the receipt of Jewish property. Further, the National Bank requested and then received a special exemption which freed it from having to transfer Jewish-owned deposits held by the bank to other institutions.⁹⁶ We can only suppose that the central bank's liberal-conservative management considered participation in the robbery of Jewish assets to be incompatible with the bank's ethics. Its freedom to act on such an important issue is noteworthy.

Albeit in an opposite sense, the freedom to act of István Kulcsár, reappointed as government commissioner for intellectual unemployment in late March 1944, was also significant. In a decree, Kulcsár ordered the immediate dismissal of 25 percent of Jewish white-collar workers, to be followed by the dismissal of a further 25 percent by April 30 and the remaining 50 percent by September 30, 1944. The decree was published at the end of March (the exact date is unknown) and sent to the companies affected on April 5. The early date of the decree's publication and the September deadline for implementation, indicate that its issuer was still unaware of the timetable for the deportations. It would seem that Kulcsár drafted this decree after having consulted with members of the Ministerial Council or at least with Sztójay. However, this too would support the interpretation that at the time no one knew exactly how the deportation of the Jews was to be implemented and then concluded.⁹⁷

A widespread view is that Eichmann directed the ghettoization and deportation of Hungary's Jews. For instance, László Karsai wrote the following: "Eichmann and his *Entjudung* experts, benefiting from the disciplined and sometimes enthusiastic work of the authorities, which were under the control of the collaborative government appointed after the occupation, exploited the indifference of the majority and the support of a not insignificant portion of the population, to scapegoat Hungarian Jews, seize their property, and detain them first in ghettos and then at transit camps."⁹⁸ In actual fact, however, Eichmann could not decide anything

⁹⁶ MOL-Ó, Z 10, 2. E 1227/1944.

⁹⁷ MOL-Ó I-79, 6849/1944 Országos Erdészeti Egyesület [National Forestry Association].

⁹⁸ Karsai, "A holokauszt utolsó fejezete."

alone. He and his small staff of fifty or sixty-five people were only authorized to advise the Hungarian authorities on issues pertaining to the Jews. To date, no one has managed to produce even a single document proving that Eichmann had the power to compel the Hungarian authorities into action on any matter falling within their competence. While it is a fact that in, among other places, Nagyvárad (Oradea), Zombor (Sombor), and Szeged, the local authorities began to establish ghettos in response to the arrival of the *Sondereinsatzkommando*, Eichmann and his deputies did not instruct them to do so. Rather, even in such cases, they formulated general objectives to be met by the Hungarian authorities and they did not officially exercise powers of decision. On occasion, Eichmann's men, with the support of the German leadership and Hungarian collaborators, would detain several hundred people in a day or force Jews placed by the Hungarians in some of the smaller ghettos or transit camps (Barcs, Sárvár, and Columbus Street, Budapest) to relocate to other camps, but they were not in a position to ghettoize the Jewish population even in smaller towns in Hungary. In Argentina and later at his trial in Jerusalem, Eichmann claimed that he could not have done anything in the absence of Endre and his gendarmes.⁹⁹

On March 28, 1944, Eichmann—for the first and last time—convened the Budapest Jewish Council, announcing, by way of his deputy, Hermann Krumei, that in future the law was to be administered by the Hungarian government rather than by the German authorities.¹⁰⁰ We can deduce from this that at the time Eichmann did not know the planned scenario of events, which comes as no surprise, given that such a scenario was still nonexistent. At their trials, both Veessenmayer and Eichmann claimed that at the time of the German occupation there had been no specific ideas about how to reach an agreement with the Hungarian authorities on the deportation of the Jews.¹⁰¹

In László Karsai's view, "It does not seem plausible that the 'master' of deportations himself and so many preselected experts would have traveled to Budapest merely for several tens of thousands of Jewish labor servicemen. Organizing the transport of 50,000 labor servicemen would have amounted to a few days' 'work' for a Wisliceny or for a Dannecker."¹⁰²

⁹⁹ See Kádár and Vági, *Hullarablás*, 111–12.

¹⁰⁰ Aly and Gerlach, *Das letzte Kapitel*, 137.

¹⁰¹ Aly and Gerlach, *Das letzte Kapitel*, 250. On Veessenmayer, also see Matic, *Edmund Veessenmayer*.

¹⁰² Karsai, "A holokauszt utolsó fejezete."

According to Gideon Hausner, the chief prosecutor in the Eichmann case, Heinrich Himmler had ordered that “the master himself be sent to Hungary.”¹⁰³ When interviewed in Argentina, Eichmann also claimed that Himmler had commanded him “to comb through the country from east to west and deport all the Jews to Auschwitz as quickly as possible.”¹⁰⁴ However, the problem with this interview, as far as the facts are concerned, is that Eichmann, who believed himself to be in complete safety, exaggerated manifestly his own significance in several respects, even to the point of boasting of his own importance.

Hausner and Karsai, both of whom were willing to give credibility to Eichmann’s boasts, fell victim to an error. In the Nazi hierarchy, neither Eichmann nor his deputies counted as “masters” in “matters of murder.” Until 1944 Eichmann had not managed a single action plan on the spot. The administrators of the Nazis’ euthanasia program or any one of more than a dozen SS and police chiefs, the commanders of the four *Einsatzgruppen* and eight *Einsatzkommandos* would have been more entitled to receive the title of “master” than were Eichmann and his team, who “only” organized deportations and were not responsible for the implementation of mass murder.¹⁰⁵ The aforementioned men organized and administered, in several occupied countries, the amassing of the Jews, their ghettoization, plunder, and murder. Still, Eichmann, even while he contributed to the organization of the deportations, did not take part in the execution of mass murder. Karsai also errs when he refers to the deportation of 50,000 persons as such a small task that Eichmann’s depu-

¹⁰³ Gideon Hausner, *Justice in Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Herzl Press, 1978).

¹⁰⁴ Yaacov Lozowick, *Hitler’s Bureaucrats: The Nazi Security Police and the Banality of Evil* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), 242–43. In the memoir written in Argentina, Eichmann wrote the following: “Himmler made it clear that he wanted Hungary to be combed through in a hideously thorough fashion before the Jews might get wind of his plans and organize a partisan resistance.” Cited in Zoltán Vági, “Endre László: Fajvédelem és bürokratikus antiszemitizmus a közigazgatási gyakorlatban 1919–1944” [László Endre: Racial protection and bureaucratic antisemitism in the practice of public administration, 1919–1944], in *Tanulmányok a holokausztról 2* [Studies on the Holocaust 2], ed. Randolph L. Braham (Budapest: Múlt és Jövő, 2002), 148.

¹⁰⁵ Stefan Klemp, *Nicht ermittelt. Polizeibataillone und die deutsche Nachkriegsjustiz* (Essen, 2011). The minimum number of Jews murdered by the police battalions is put at 635,441. The real number may have been twice as high. The substantiated numbers of murder victims are as follows: 3rd Police Battalion: 100,000; 9th Police Battalion: 97,000; 101st Police Battalion: 38,000; 320th Police Battalion: 45,800.

ties would not even have bothered with it. Yet we know that Eichmann's underlings deported, over a four-year period, "only" around 80,000 Jews from France, 30,000 from Belgium, 60,000 from Greece, and 12,000 from Italy—and in no instance was this achieved in under a few days, as Karsai implies. Theodor Dannecker spent months overseeing the deportation of around 11,000 Jews from areas of Greece occupied by Bulgaria.

Another example of a certain amount of freedom of action is the refusal of the Hungarian police in Munkács (Mukacheve) to accede to Dannecker's instructions and shoot dead a hundred Jews on April 17, 1944.¹⁰⁶ In theory, Dannecker could then have organized the executions himself, but for some reason he did not do so, possibly because he wished to avoid violating Hungarian sovereignty. Dannecker later deployed to Nagyvárad (Oradea), where he took control of the ghetto from May 1 to 9, 1944.¹⁰⁷ Even there, however, the Hungarian authorities managed to undermine Dannecker's position and take control of the ghetto. For instance, several dozen Jews were spared deportation from Nagyvárad when a number of non-Jews helped get them transferred to a hospital after they feigned a typhus infection. Yet, elsewhere even people with physical disabilities were thrown into the railway wagons. The decision about this was taken by the Hungarian authorities.¹⁰⁸ In contrast, in Alsógöd on April 20, the local administration ordered the amassing of all adult Jews even though they had received no instruction to do so, as the village lay in the final deportation zone. The men summoned to the village hall were transported, in light clothing, to the internment camp in Sárvár, whence they were deported to Auschwitz on May 21.¹⁰⁹

Other examples underline the significant role played by the Hungarian side. On April 1, 1944, the SD's office in Kassa (Košice) requested that all Jews in the Carpathian region be placed in ghettos in three cities and within three days. To justify the urgency, they cited the fact that the

¹⁰⁶ MOL (Óbuda), Mikrofilmek, I-sorozat, 13-as tekercs, az ungvári polgármesteri hivatal átírata 1944. április 18 [Microfilms, Series I, Roll 13, transcript of the Ungvár Mayor's Office, April 18, 1944]. For background information on this matter, see Kádár and Vági, *A végső döntés*, 197–98.

¹⁰⁷ Alexander Leitner, *Die Tragödie der Juden in Nagyvárad* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem Archives, File JM 2686) (cited in "Aly and Gerlach, *Das letzte Kapitel*, 138).

¹⁰⁸ Dániel Lőwy, "Zsolt Béla és a 'flekktífuszos' betegek rendhagyó megmenekülése a nagyváradai gettóban" [Béla Zsolt and the extraordinary escape of typhus patients in the Nagyvárad (Oradea) ghetto], *Múlt és Jövő* 3 (2011): 78–83, http://www.multesjovo.hu/hu/aitdownloadablefiles/download/aitfile/aitfile_id/1439/.

¹⁰⁹ Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*.

region had been declared a field of operations, with Soviet troops massing on the northern side of the Carpathians. Although the Ministry of the Interior issued a decree of similar content on April 2, the military leadership prevented its implementation on grounds that it would have interfered with the deployment of troops in the region.¹¹⁰ In other words, it was possible, without incurring ramifications, to defy the orders of the German security police.

As April proceeded, it was still unclear what fate the Germans envisioned for Hungarian Jews. Prior to April 5, Ribbentrop had even suggested to Hitler that the Hungarian Jews should be “gifted” to Roosevelt and Churchill with a view to increasing tensions between the Allies and in the Middle East.¹¹¹

On April 6, Hitler requested 100,000 Jews for a program of forced labor in Germany, for which Veesenmayer obtained Sztójay or Horthy’s approval on April 13. On April 17, Hitler repeated to Goebbels that 700,000 Hungarian Jews should be better integrated into war production (“für unsere Kriegszwecke nutzbringende Tätigkeit”).¹¹² This pronouncement would also indicate that there were no ready-made plans in this regard.

In Auschwitz, the central construction management was ordered, on March 29, to minimize further extensions to the camp. In the first half of April, all construction works were brought to a halt. Preparations for the construction of a camp for newly arrived deportees began only after May 8, 1944. The next day Himmler spoke to his staff about 200,000 Hungarian Jewish forced laborers, and—alongside Hitler—he demanded 10,000 soldiers from the Wehrmacht command for surveillance tasks.¹¹³

On a small number of occasions, the Germans, acting in their own capacity, ran deportation trains to Auschwitz, carrying deportees from the Carpathian region in particular. And they also took 900 Jews from Barcs without even informing the Hungarian side. In response to subsequent inquiries, the Hungarian gendarme officer in charge was told that the SD commanders had jurisdiction to deport up to 2,000 persons. However, the SD did not claim that it was their task to settle the issue in full. All indica-

¹¹⁰ László Karsai, “Zsidósors Kárpátalján 1944-ben” [The fate of the Jews in the Carpathian region in 1944], *Múlt és Jövő* 3 (1991): 60–66.

¹¹¹ Cited in Randolph L. Braham, ed., *The Destruction of Hungarian Jewry: A Documentary Account* (New York: Pro Arte, 1963), 334.

¹¹² Elke Fröhlich, ed., *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, part 2, vol. 12 (Munich: K. G. Saur, 1987), 137.

¹¹³ Aly and Gerlach, *Das letzte Kapitel*, 256.

tions suggest that for the SD the purpose of these irregular actions was to test the Hungarian public administration's willingness to cooperate.¹¹⁴

The Hungarian Decision-Makers behind the Deportations

Much of the data suggests that the deportation of the Jews was backed by several individuals and that the ideas became increasingly radical.¹¹⁵ The role of the German authorities was to remove the legal hurdles after the occupation, thereby enabling the implementation of the most radical ideas.

Here, one should note that the Hungarian parliament had formulated the necessity of resettling (expelling) Hungary's Jewish population as early as 1939. The preamble to Act 2 of 1939 had explicitly stated this aim, and in the ensuing period various party politicians and government members had begun to envisage the possible means of resettlement (expulsion). Prominent members of the governing party had participated in this process. Indeed, it was only the dilatory policy of Miklós Kállay that had succeeded in suppressing their proposals for a time.¹¹⁶ Almost without exception, the politicians who came to power in the aftermath of the German occupation were strongly in favor of deportation, and so the policy rapidly became a part of the Sztójay government's program.

Although at the time the German occupiers had yet to decide how the deportations should take place and who should be deported from the country, Hungarian leaders were sure that the Jewish population would soon be deported. Gendarme Colonel József Czigány, a confidant of the commander of the central investigative department of the Hungarian gendarmerie, was dining with László Baký a few days after March 19, 1944, when he was told by Baký that the Jewish population would shortly be gathered together, placed in ghettos and then transported to Germany. The same claim was made by Lajos Kudar, a lieutenant-colonel in the gendar-

¹¹⁴ Statement of László Hajnácskőy, December 31, 1945. See Karsai and Molnár, *Endre-Baký-Íaross*, 380.

¹¹⁵ In this regard, in their most recent book Gábor Kádár and Zoltán Vági argue, rightly in my view, that László Endre and Adolf Eichmann were principally responsible for the deportations, but also that Endre in particular radicalized events. See Kádár and Vági, *A végső döntés*, 155–204.

¹¹⁶ For more details, see Krisztián Ungváry, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege. Diszkrimináció, szociálpolitika és antiszemitizmus Magyarországon 1919–1944* [A balance sheet of the Horthy regime: Discrimination, social policy and antisemitism in Hungary] (Pécs: OSZK–Jelenkor, 2012), 184–409 and 493–509.

merie and deputy head of the State Security Center, who was a confidant of László Endre.¹¹⁷ Such leading national politicians as Miklós Kállay and Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer were sure that a German occupation would automatically lead to the deportation of the country's entire Jewish population. And this would be so, not because of an immediate and nonnegotiable German demand, but because the resettlement (expulsion) of the Jewish population had been sought uniformly by a majority of Hungary's domestic political forces—above all the governing party and the extreme right—ever since 1939. Indeed, their petitions and bills in this regard had only been stalled through the intentional obstruction of the work of the legislature, the adjournment of parliament and other rather drastic means. Until the German occupation, Horthy had resisted demands for the deportation of the Jews. After March 19, however, he informed the prime minister that he did not wish to exercise his right of veto (his right of prior consent) with respect to anti-Jewish measures. On March 22, the Ministerial Council discussed the methods of a "solution." The minutes of the meeting are unknown, but it is likely that on this occasion the issue was discussed only in general terms, while Sztójay told those in attendance that the regent had consented to a settlement of the Jewish question. It is evident, however, that at the time no one could have been sure of the exact meaning of a "settlement of the Jewish question on the German model," for there existed several "German models."

The Ministerial Council debated the issue of ghettoization for the first time on April 4. On April 7, the decree of the interior minister was published: "The Royal Hungarian Government will shortly cleanse the country of the Jews." While we might be inclined to view this as the emergence of some kind of "master plan," in fact we would be wrong to do so. It is more accurate to view this particular provision of the decree as a pledge to make good on a policy that had been advocated ever since 1939. On the other hand, the decree accurately stated the chronological order in which the Jewish population was to be deported from the various districts until early July. László Endre later claimed that the Germans had formulated the decree and that the Ministry of the Interior had merely implemented their instructions.¹¹⁸ Endre was not stating the complete truth, because, although the German side had elaborated the preliminary draft, he himself had fully revised the text of the decree in order to maximize

¹¹⁷ Karsai, "A végső döntésképtelenség," 191.

¹¹⁸ Karsai and Molnár, *Endre-Baky-Jaross*, 89. László Endre's hearing, December 18, 1945.

the Hungarian government's (budgetary) interests. As I have already mentioned, the Germans would surely not have insisted on Jewish deportees to Auschwitz being robbed of any belongings that were made of gold prior to their departure from Hungary. And yet the decree stipulated body searches prior to departure. Further, the decree contained merely framework conditions, while decisions on a whole range of issues were left to a later date. In other words, the decree cannot be regarded as part of a comprehensive master plan. We can exclude the possibility that ghettoization was envisaged as a permanent measure, firstly because the political objective had always been resettlement (expulsion) rather than ghettoization and secondly because the ghettos were established, from the outset, as temporary places of abode, being completely unfit for human habitation in the longer term. On April 7, 1944, the day on which the Ministry of the Interior published Decree no. 6163/1944 BM Res., a conference was held at the ministry which Gábor Kádár and Zoltán Vági have justifiably compared to the Wannsee Conference of January 20, 1942.¹¹⁹ After the text of the decree had been distributed, here too "pending" matters were discussed.

In the Carpathian region, ghettoization was begun almost immediately, while in areas within the Trianon borders the process was carried out over the space of two months. For instance, in Miskolc, ghettoization was completed in early June. In Budapest, the public administrative bodies discussed the issue of ghettoization from early April onwards, but for various reasons the first ghetto plan emerged only on May 9.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ In László Karsai's view, the analogy is false, because minutes were not taken at the Hungarian Ministry of the Interior conference, and out of the decisions taken at the Wannsee Conference "nothing was realized." In my opinion, these complaints are unfounded. Even if minutes were not taken, a discussion of the various ministries' competences and tasks could have taken place at the Hungarian Ministry of the Interior meeting—just as in Wannsee. And while it is true that few decisions were taken at the Wannsee Conference (similar to the Ministry of the Interior conference) and the decision to annihilate the Jews had been taken at an earlier point in time, in Wannsee the ministers were able to outline their respective positions, whereby the occasion served primarily to clarify disputed issues. The most important decision taken at Wannsee was that the annihilation of the Jews should be partially accomplished in the course of road construction works in the east—and this plan was indeed realized in the subsequent period. For more details, see Christian Gerlach, *Krieg, Ernährung, Völkermord. Forschungen zur deutschen Vernichtungspolitik im zweiten Weltkrieg* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1998), 85–167.

¹²⁰ For more information on the ghettoization of the Jewish population in Budapest, see Tim Cole, *Holocaust City: The Making of a Jewish Ghetto* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

The deportation of the Jews of Nagyvárad (Oradea) began on May 24 and was concluded on June 3. Jews taken to ghettos from settlements within the Trianon borders were treated differently, being deported only at the end of June. The question arises: What goal did such delays serve? In a technical and operational sense, deporting everyone immediately would have been a simpler solution. Everything points to a separate political decision on this matter. This, in turn, strongly suggests that the people directing events were not simply the executors of a preformulated “master plan.”

It is noteworthy how—throughout the country—collective decisions were taken on ghettoization and on establishing the prerequisites for deportation. A necessity in the so-called ghettoizing committees was close cooperation between local chief constables, mayors, gendarme commanders, and police chiefs. In this process, the active involvement of the German side was the least requirement.

The Master Plan and an Agreement in April or May of 1944?

Several factors thus indicate that a “deportation master plan” never actually existed. Rather, the process consisted of cumulative measures that were formally or tacitly decided upon and then legitimized in a number of steps. Veessenmayer himself spoke of “*Vereinbarungen*,” which in itself suggests the existence of a separate agreement at each stage of the deportation process. Götz Aly and Christian Gerlach emphasize that “the existence of a deportation plan at an early stage which did not then become known only because it was a well-kept secret, can be ruled out.”¹²¹

Decisions on the deportations were thus taken at several stages.¹²² It is worth outlining here the major milestones. The first important date was April 7, 1944, when—as already mentioned—the Ministry of the Interior

¹²¹ Aly and Gerlach, *Das letzte Kapitel*, 263, 266.

¹²² In my opinion, Karsai construes this issue erroneously when he criticizes Kádár and Vági for, in his view, tying the “final agreement” to a meeting between Eichmann and Endre at Szentkút on April 22 (also attended by Jaross, Baky, Winckelmann, and Geschke). In actual fact, Kádár and Vági offer a somewhat more differentiated account of the decision-making process leading to the deportations, although it is true that they consider the main decision to have been taken on this date. Here, it is worth noting that no one has yet examined in detail the decisions taken at Ministry of the Interior meetings and at other forums after April 22, 1944. This will be a prerogative of future research.

issued Decree no. 6163/1944 on “cleansing” the country of the Jews. The decree marked the commencement of the fulfillment of political promises and demands made over several years. The next major date was April 12 when the ghettoization of the Jewish population of the Carpathian region in the town of Munkács (today Mukacheve) was started. On the same day, in the evening hours, representatives of the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of the Interior dined with Eichmann and Winkelmann. One may assume that they discussed and agreed upon the details of the deportations. On April 13, Sztójay pledged to supply Germany with 50,000 and then 100,000 forced laborers. On April 17, Horthy (who had previously renounced his right of veto on Jewish matters) nevertheless considered it important to summon Endre to an audience and give his consent to the deportations. On the same day, Defense Minister Csatay also gave his consent. No later than at this time, the decision was taken to remove the labor servicemen from the deportation contingent. On the morning of April 22, the RSHA also consented to the deportation of the first contingent of 50,000 deportees, and by the same evening Endre, Eichmann, and Veessenmayer had decided that in place of 50,000 labor servicemen, the entire Jewish population of the Carpathian region and, if possible, Jews from other ghettos, would be deported. According to the final sentence of the telegram, “the action plan against the Jews was complete and total.” This seems to mark the point in time when the execution of a universal deportation plan became a definitive fact.¹²³

Many people tie the emergence of some kind of master plan to the so-called railway conference. This is contradicted by the fact that negotiations at the German–Hungarian railway conferences were originally limited to the deportation of Jews from territories reannexed by Hungary under the Vienna Awards, whereby the anticipated number of deportees was estimated at 325,000. The first railway conference took place in Vienna on May 4–5, at which Eichmann’s team and their Hungarian intermediary, Gendarme Captain Leó Lulay, finalized the measures in conjunction with representatives of the Slovak, Hungarian and German Reich railways. It was also at this meeting that the decision was taken to run four trains, rather than one, to Auschwitz every day, with forty-five wagons in each train. Even at this conference, it was still anticipated that the total number of deportees would

¹²³ *Wilhelmstrasse*, 836. The section of the text in question is imprecisely rendered in Hungarian as “a zsidóakció átfogó, egységes egészet képez” [the action against the Jews constitutes a comprehensive and coherent whole], whereas in the original German it reads as follows: “Judenaktion als ein totales ganzes.”

be “only” 300,000, which suggests that they were planning on the deportation of the Jewish populations of the Carpathian region and Northern Transylvania.¹²⁴ It seems likely that it was still unclear whether the entire Jewish population of Hungary outside Budapest was to be deported.

In the end, no fewer than 437,000 people were deported between May 15 and July 9. This is particularly interesting in view of the fact that until the beginning of June all documents that gave some indication of the anticipated number of deportees refer to approximately a hundred transports with a total of 300,000 deportees. As late as May 17, a report heard by the Ministerial Council referred to the deportation of Jews from Upper Hungary and from Transylvania, that is to say, from areas reannexed by Hungary under the terms of the Vienna Awards—although in this particular case it is questionable whether the minutes of the meeting recorded every single detail accurately. A critical view of the sources is justified, as the government treated the “settlement of the Jewish question” in a rather coy fashion and was wary of passing laws that might legitimize—even retrospectively—robbery committed against hundreds of thousands of people (even though such plans did clearly exist). Annotation in the minutes of Ministerial Council meetings signals that ministers gave their implicit consent on matters they wanted to remain undocumented. What is certain is that no one spoke out against the measures.

On May 23, Eichmann told von Thadden for the first time that the deportations would involve everyone, apart from the 80,000 labor servicemen (Eichmann underestimated the number of servicemen; in reality they were twice as numerous).¹²⁵ The surplus in the anticipated number of deportees was clearly due to an overzealous Hungarian bureaucracy. The possibilities open to the Hungarian and German implementers of the deportation plans are well illustrated by a series of conflicts that arose between Rudolf Höss, commandant of the concentration camp at Auschwitz, and László Endre. Höss came to Hungary in early May 1944, holding trial selections at several of the country’s ghettos. He discovered that at most 30 percent of the ghetto inhabitants were fit for work.¹²⁶ On April 24, 1944, Eichmann had reckoned on a daily transport to Auschwitz of 3,000 people on one train (Höss was reluctant to receive so

¹²⁴ Veessenmayer’s telegram to Minister of Foreign Affairs Ribbentrop, May 11, 1944, *Wilhelmstrasse*, doc. no. 662, 845.

¹²⁵ Legation Counselor Von Thadden’s memorandum to the German Minister of Foreign Affairs, May 26, 1944, *Wilhelmstrasse*, doc. no. 674, 854.

¹²⁶ Kádár and Vági, *A végső döntés*, 213–14.

many deportees, noting that limited capacity meant he could “process” only one train every three days). For their part, however, the Hungarian authorities (responding to László Endre’s demands¹²⁷) raised the number to four trains per day, carrying in a total of 12,000 deportees. It is worth noting how an agreement was reached: Endre proposed six transports daily, in response to which Eichmann recommended there should be two and the two men then agreed on four transports.¹²⁸ However, after protests from Höss, who had just arrived in Budapest, the two sides finally agreed on two transports daily.¹²⁹ Subsequently, however, the Hungarian side failed to adhere to the agreement, and so in the first two weeks fifty-eight trains carrying 184,049 deportees arrived in Auschwitz. This was 80,000 more than had been agreed. On June 8, 1944, Höss appealed to Himmler, requesting a temporary halt to the deportations as the camp’s infrastructure could not cope. A temporary halt thus occurred from June 8 to 16. Eichmann also recollected how he had “constantly received ... protests from Höss” concerning the excessive number of deportees, their poor physical state, the lack of provisions, and the impossibility of accommodating so many people who were unfit for work.¹³⁰ For his part, Höss wrote in his memoirs that “I had to fight for the postponement of every single train. In most cases, I did not prevail. Indeed, [Eichmann] often surprised me with unplanned transports.”¹³¹ If the original German plan for the daily transport of 3,000 deportees had been adhered to, then “only” 170,000 or so people would have been deported to Auschwitz by July 9, 1944, the day on which the deportations were ceased. Under this scenario, 150,000 people might have escaped the gas chambers, given that 437,000 people were actually transported to the Nazi death camp.¹³²

As to who was responsible for these events, the unavoidable conclusion is that the Hungarian authorities bear the main responsibility. Evidently, primary responsibility lies with László Endre, but, on his own, he would have been unable to deport a single Jew. He needed a zealous

¹²⁷ Veesenmayer’s report to the German Minister of Foreign Affairs, May 4, 1944. Braham, *The Destruction of Hungarian Jewry*, 366. See also Kádár and Vági, *Hullarablás*, 142–43; Aly and Gerlach, *Das letzte Kapitel*, 254.

¹²⁸ Jenő Lévai, *The Hungarian Deportations in the Light of the Eichmann Trial* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1964), 96.

¹²⁹ Aly and Gerlach, *Das letzte Kapitel*, 256.

¹³⁰ Kádár and Vági, *Hullarablás*, 174.

¹³¹ Steven Paulsky, ed., *Death Dealer. The Memoirs of the SS-Commandant at Auschwitz* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 241–42.

¹³² Karsai and Molnár, *Endre-Baky-Jaross*, 507–8.

bureaucracy and a well-oiled Hungarian public administration. In addition to the gendarmerie, the required collaborators included a wide range of state employees from the staff of county orphan agencies to female body-friskers. According to estimates, the deportation process gave some kind of official task to 200,000 people or so. When a prosecutor at Eichmann's trial in Israel (1961) described how the Hungarian government had considered the deportations to be a German "diktat," Eichmann laughed loudly and stated that he had a completely different impression regarding the situation, rather the contrary. In his memoirs, which he wrote during his time in prison, he wrote about his "admiration for Hungary's public administration." Eichmann's statements are rendered credible by their consistency: he said similar things at the time of the deportations and later on as an émigré in Argentina. Moreover, his views were shared by members of his staff.

A Halt to the Deportations

On June 26, 1944, at the first meeting of the Crown Council to be held after the German occupation, Horthy attempted to achieve a halt to the deportations. His intervention was fruitless at the time, but even his request was insufficiently definitive. Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Mihály Jungert-Artnóthy later recalled how Horthy had expressly prohibited only the deportation of Budapest's Jewish population.¹³³ In early July 1944, Horthy did succeed in bringing a halt to the deportations—or, more precisely, in preventing further Hungarian involvement in the deportations. According to his notes, his view was that if the Germans wanted to deport the Jews, then they should be the ones to execute the plan.¹³⁴ Contrary to oft-repeated myths,¹³⁵ Horthy did not order the deployment of the 1st Hungarian Armored Division in Budapest with a view to ensuring

¹³³ Jenő Lévai, *Zsidósors Magyarországon* [A Jewish fate in Hungary] (Budapest: Magyar Téka, 1948), 221.

¹³⁴ Ilona Benoschofsky and Elek Karsai, eds., *Vádirat a náciizmus ellen* [Indictment against Nazism], vol. 3, 1944. június 26. Nyilatkozat-tervezet Horthy-kormányzó részére a Koronatanács ülésére [June 26, 1944. Draft statement for Regent Horthy for the meeting of the Crown Council]. (Budapest: Magyar Izraeliták Országos Képviselőlete, 1958), 3–6.

¹³⁵ For instance, the myths about Ferenc Koszorús which have been circulated recently by the public service media and by such newspapers as *Heti Válasz* and *Magyar Nemzet*. For a rebuttal, see Judit Molnár, "Merjünk nagyot csúsztatni" [Dare to tell a big lie], *Élet és Irodalom* 58.3 (2014).

a halt to the deportations. There would have been no need for this, as he had already given the Gendarmerie precise orders, which the gendarmes knew they must follow. Eichmann and his henchmen were annoyed about Horthy's decision and attempted, where they could, to evade the ban on deportations, but all of this did not alter the bottom line: Horthy merely had to say the word, and the machine immediately shut down. There was no special protest or retaliation from the German side. Veessenmayer reassured a rather anxious Sztójay that "we maintain our stance that a further *Entjudung* of Budapest should be carried out by the Hungarians themselves."¹³⁶ The question arises: What might have happened if Horthy had decided a month earlier to prohibit the Hungarian gendarmerie from collaborating in the deportations?

In August 1944, Horthy found himself at another crossroads. The sources currently at our disposal do not reveal what arguments were used by the German side to persuade the Hungarian government—and Horthy himself—to consent to the partial deportation of Budapest's Jewish population. On August 19, Interior Minister Miklós Bonczos informed Eichmann that the deportation of Budapest's Jews might commence in six days' time.¹³⁷ Thanks to a fortunate historical coincidence—Romania's exit from the war—this deportation never took place.

In summary, the deportations were the consequence of cumulative decisions rather than a "master plan," whereby the approval and consent of political leaders was sought and received at every stage in the process. After the deportations were halted, Veessenmayer wrote accurately to Sztójay that the German side's unchanging stance was that the Hungarian authorities were to be responsible for administering the deportations. After the German occupation, the Hungarian government—if it wished to remain in place—clearly had no other option but to introduce restrictions on the Jewish population. Yet the Germans did not prescribe the exact nature of the required measures. The Hungarian government might have decided merely to launch an expanded "police action against migrants" or, by establishing concentration camps, it might have deported only the nonassimilated Jews of the Carpathian region. By the same token, it might have opted to deport Hungary's entire Jewish population, including the Jews of Budapest. The final choice of the country's leaders reflects upon the quality (or lack thereof) of Hungarian politics and public life.

¹³⁶ *Wilhelmstrasse*, doc. no. 696 (July 9, 1944), 880.

¹³⁷ *Wilhelmstrasse*, 897. See also Kádár and Vági, *A végső döntés*, 208–9.

The Holocaust in Transylvania

Zoltán Tibori Szabó

After their emancipation in 1867 and the recognition of their religion¹ in 1895, the Jews living in Transylvania² then belonging to the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy developed a sophisticated economic, social, cultural, and religious life. The Jewry became the only minority within the empire that followed the path of complete assimilation and unconditional loyalty. For the Jews, Hungary became an attractive and safe option. From every province of the monarchy, Jews were migrating to Transylvania, where the size of the Jewish population was gradually rising. In 1920, the number of Transylvanian residents who identified themselves as being of Israelite faith was 182,489. By 1930, they numbered 192,833, and by 1941, their community consisted of more than 200,000 people.

Until the end of the First World War, members of the Jewish community achieved important positions within Transylvanian society, contributed successfully to the development of the local industry and finance, erected several beautiful synagogues, and almost all of them embraced sin-

¹ Act No. 42 of 1895 defined the Judaism as a “received” religion in Hungary, equal to other *religiones receptae* (accepted religions) such as the Catholic and the main Protestant ones. Before the adoption of the law, Judaism was defined first as a “tolerated,” then as a “recognized” religion.

² Transylvania, including the Partium, the Máramaros and the Banat (in Hungarian: Bánság) regions, was a part of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy until 1920, when it became a part of the Romanian Kingdom. Between 1940 and 1944 Northern Transylvania was again under Hungarian rule. Since 1947, the whole Transylvania has belonged to Romania.

cerely the Hungarian assimilation path. Antisemitism existed within the Austrian-Hungarian dual monarchy; still, the Jews were convinced that the authorities would protect them from any kind of fatal consequences.

The participation of Jews in the short-lived Soviet-type Communist regime in Hungary in 1919 and the territorial losses of the country after the war intensified the antisemitic feelings and beliefs of the Hungarians. Subsequently, as early as 1920, Hungary adopted the first anti-Jewish law in Europe, and raised antisemitism to the state policy level.

After the Treaty of Trianon and the Romanian annexation of Transylvania in 1920, Transylvanian Jewry found itself in a double minority status within the newly created Greater Romania. The Romanian majority identified them as belonging to the Hungarian ethnic group because their mother tongue and cultural background was Hungarian, while within the Hungarian-speaking community they constituted a minority group because they were of the Israelite faith.³

During the next two decades, Romanian authorities tried hard to dissimilate the Transylvanian Jews from the Hungarian culture and language, and to assimilate them to the Romanian ones. Undoubtedly, due to political, economic, and financial interests, a certain part of the Transylvanian Jewry became more and more linked to Bucharest. Nonetheless, the vast majority of the community remained attached to the Hungarian culture and mother tongue. At any rate, for them, the “golden era” of the monarchy was over, and from time to time, they were reminded—both by the Romanian and by the Hungarian side—that they were different.

This cultural behavior partly explains why Transylvanian Jews were celebrating when, after the Second Vienna Award of August 30, 1940, Hungarian troops occupied the northern part of Transylvania. The award returned Northern Transylvania to Hungary, and during the first weeks of September 1940, the Hungarian military and civil administration took over the 43,000 km² section of Transylvania, inhabited by nearly 2.5 million people, out of whom 165,000 were considered Jews under the Hungarian racial legislation. The likewise assimilated Jewry of Southern Transylvania that remained under Romanian rule were saddened and disappointed by the border revision. Another reason why the Second Vienna Award overjoyed the overwhelming majority of the assimilated, urban-

³ Attila Gidó, *Úton. Erdélyi zsidó társadalom- és nemzetépítési kísérletek (1918–1940)* [On the way: Transylvanian Jewish society and nation-building experiments, 1918–1940] (Csikszereda: Pro-Print Könyvkiadó, 2009), 35–41.

ized Jewry of Northern Transylvania was the fact that only a few weeks before the Vienna Award, Romania adopted drastic anti-Jewish legislation. The Jews were aware by that time of the similar anti-Jewish laws enacted in Hungary,⁴ but they trusted the Hungarian state much more than the Romanian one.

It is a twist of fate that eventually, among the Hungarian Jews from Transylvania, those who remained under Romanian authority within Southern Transylvania were the more fortunate, surviving the critical era with a minimal number of lives lost, despite the fact that they also had to face deportations and forced labor under humiliating and brutal conditions.

Between 1940 and 1944, during Hungarian rule, Northern Transylvanian Jewry were exposed to several waves of atrocities: firstly, to expulsion and deportation to Galicia; secondly, to the “Holocaust by bullets”; thirdly, to extermination by work, hunger, and disease during the forced labor service; and, finally, to the mass deportation to Auschwitz and the almost total destruction in German Nazi camps.

More than three-quarters—125,000 to 130,000 members—of the Jewish community of Northern Transylvania perished during the Holocaust, while the losses among the Southern Transylvanian Jewry were around 1,000 people out of a total of 42,000. The overall result of this enormous genocide was that in the whole Transylvanian area, including the Partium and the Banat, less than one-third of the Jews, that is, around 75,000 to 80,000 individuals survived the Holocaust.

The purpose of this study is to provide an overview of the fate of the Jews of Transylvania during the period of the Holocaust, together with a redefinition of the different phases of the destruction of the Transylvanian Jewry.

⁴ According to László Karsai, during the Horthy era (1920–1944), the Hungarian parliament adopted 22 anti-Jewish laws, while in the same period of time the Hungarian government, the prime minister and the different ministries enacted around 300 anti-Jewish decrees. For details, see László Karsai, *A magyarországi zsidótörvények és -rendeletek* [Laws and decrees concerning the Jews of Hungary], in Judit Molnár, ed., *A holokauszt Magyarországon európai perspektívában* [The Holocaust in Hungary: a European perspective] (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2005), 140–163. (On the Internet see: http://www.hdke.hu/files/csatolmanyok/09_KarsaiLaszlo_AMagyarorszagi_zsidotorvenyek.pdf).

The Holocaust in Northern Transylvania

Abuses, Expulsions: The First Wave of Murderous Deportations

Only weeks after the re-annexation of the northern part of Transylvania, under the pretext of checking the citizenship of Jews in most counties of the region, the Hungarian authorities began committing atrocities. A barely known chapter of the tragedy of the Hungarian Jewry is the series of abuses, expulsions, and deportations taking place largely in Szekler settlements in the fall of 1940, from October through December.

The Hungarian authorities rounded up many Jewish families that had been declared “stateless,” and forced them to cross the Hungarian–Romanian border. When this failed, as happened in most cases, the persecuted individuals were transported at their own expense to Kőrösmező in Carpatho-Ruthenia,⁵ a border settlement at that time on the Hungarian side of the Hungarian–Soviet border. They were pushed over in December 1940 to Galicia, in the Soviet Union, becoming the first victims of the Northern Transylvanian Holocaust. Those who did not freeze to death in the deep snow or were not killed by wild animals were sent to Galician Soviet concentration camps. Very few of them survived the war.

The majority of those deported in December 1940 were born in Transylvania and were able to show certificates proving their Hungarian citizenship. Yet as a result of the brutal, occasionally even hysterical anti-Jewish propaganda, neither the Christian Transylvanian population nor the Hungarian military or civil authorities sympathized with those who were subjected to deportation.

An illustrative example of this early phase of the Northern Transylvanian Holocaust is that of the Jews living in Csík⁶ County, where in September 1940 Colonel Elemér Éder was appointed as chief of the military administration. His first acts were to introduce radical measures against the Jews living in the county. Jewish students were no longer admitted to high schools,⁷ and Jews were forced to pay large amounts of money for different purposes. Colonel Éder immediately instructed the new authorities

⁵ In Ukrainian: Yasinia, in Romanian: Frasin; today in Ukraine.

⁶ In Romanian: Ciuc.

⁷ Randolph L. Braham, *A népirtás politikája. A Holocaust Magyarországon* [Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary] (Budapest: Belvárosi Kiadó, 1997), 187.

that the citizenship of all Jews must be checked, and prohibited the issuing of new Hungarian identification cards to Jews.

The overwhelming majority of the local Jews were born and raised in Transylvania, and were Romanian subjects during the interwar period. According to the Hungarian legal provisions that followed the Second Vienna Award, "Romanian citizens who were permanent residents on August 30, 1940, in the re-annexed ... Transylvanian territory will regain their Hungarian citizenship without departmental measures." Also, "[t]hose Romanian citizens of Hungarian nationality who were permanent residents in the territories that were ceded to Romania by the Treaty of Trianon ... and that remained Romanian according to the Vienna Arbitral Award of August 30, 1940, will regain their Hungarian citizenship without departmental measures if they practice their right of option, according to paragraph 4 of the arbitral award, in favor of Hungarian citizenship."⁸ In the meantime, Hungarian authorities issued secret decrees differentiating between those inhabitants who were born, and those who were not born in Northern Transylvania, as well as between settlers born in other parts of Transylvania, and those born outside the territory of the former Greater Hungary.⁹

In October 1940, Colonel Éder ordered the Jews of Csíkszereda¹⁰ to pay, within three days, 80,000 pengős as war indemnity (according to other sources,¹¹ as a fee for public works) "into the Horthy Fund."¹² When the deadline was not met, he used it as a pretext to round up those Jews whose citizenship was considered doubtful and have them expelled to Romania, a measure considered illegal at the time by most of the Jews and

⁸ 1940. évi XXVI. törvénycikk [Act No. XXVI of 1940], <http://www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3¶m=8140>. Excellent overviews of the legal frame of the time affecting the Jewish population were provided by László Karsai, *Holokauszt* [Holocaust] (Budapest: Pannonica Kiadó, 2001), 209–54; and Kinga Frojimovics, *I Have Been a Stranger in a Strange Land: The Hungarian State and Jewish Refugees in Hungary, 1933–1945* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2007), 57–102.

⁹ See for example: Decree no. 196/1/1940. VII.b. res. BM; quoted in Frojimovics, *I Have Been a Stranger*, 87–88.

¹⁰ In Romanian: Miercurea Ciuc.

¹¹ Frojimovics, *I Have Been a Stranger*, 94.

¹² Béla János Bács and Katalin Szabó, eds., *Voltak. Emlékezés a csíkszeredai zsidó közösségre* [They were: Remembering the Jewish community of Csíkszereda] (Csíkszereda: Csíkszereda Polgármesteri Hivatala, 1999), 7–12.

a handful of Christians.¹³ In fact, Decree No. 8130/1939-ME allowed the evacuation of “unwanted elements” from certain settlements, but expulsion from the country was contrary even to the racial laws of the time.¹⁴

According to other sources, Éder demanded 40,000 pengős from the Csíkszereda Jews. Because the Jewish representatives tried to bargain with him, the Colonel threatened grave consequences, and a few days later he ordered the Jewish congregation to submit the list of their members to him. Éder and his political advisers divided the Jews of Csíkszereda into three categories. The first list was made up of the names of approximately 20 percent of the Jewish population, and the listed individuals were supposed to be sent immediately across the border. The second group of around 60 percent included those who were to be resettled in other regions of the country. And the third category, the remaining 20 percent, were to be allowed to remain, later to be conscripted for labor service, interned, and eventually deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau.¹⁵

The first expulsion took place in November 1940.¹⁶ On November 4, Colonel Éder ordered each of the twenty-four Jewish families, including the families of their hazan and other prominent individuals of the community, to pay 20 to 100 pengős to the treasury of the town by noon that day. Because nobody was able to meet the demand, the heads of the families were summoned to the office of First Lieutenant Albrecht, deputy military commander of the town. They were given 30 minutes to pay the sums to

¹³ Tamás Majsai, “Egy epizód az észak-erdélyi zsidóság második világháború alatti történetéből: Slachta Margit fellépése a Csíkszeredáról kiutasított zsidók érdekében” [An episode of the Second World War history of the Northern Transylvanian Jewry: The action of Margit Slachta on behalf of the Jews expelled from Csíkszereda], *Medvetánc* [Budapest], 1988/4–1989/1, 3–33; Tamás Majsai, “The Deportation of Jews from Csíkszereda and Margit Slachta’s Intervention on Their Behalf,” in *Studies on the Holocaust in Hungary*, ed. Randolph L. Braham (Boulder: Social Science Monographs; New York: Csengeri Institute for Holocaust Studies of the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York, 1990), 113–63.

¹⁴ Zoltán Tibori Szabó, “Csík vármegye zsidósága a betelepüléstől a megsemmisítésig” [The Jewry of Csík County from the Settlement to the Annihilation], in *Tanulmányok a holokausztról*—3 [Studies on the Holocaust 3], ed. Randolph L. Braham (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2004), 115–21.

¹⁵ Gheorghe I. Bodea, *Tragedia evreilor din nordul Transilvaniei—1944* [The tragedy of the Northern Transylvanian Jews, 1944] (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Hiperion, 2001), 63–64.

¹⁶ Majsai, “The Deportation of Jews,” 149–50.

the municipal treasury. All of them were by then ready to pay, but the treasurer would not give anyone receipts.

In the evening of November 7, the head of every family received summonses to appear at the police station the following morning at 08:00. Each of them was told to pay 100 to 150 pengő to the treasury of the town, again receiving no receipt. Then they were told that, in accordance with the decision of the military commander of the town, each of them would be deported immediately, together with their families. The police would not listen to any arguments. The family heads were sent home under gendarmerie escort to collect their belongings, “as much as they could carry,” and then were returned to the police station with their families.

Newborn babies, elementary school children, and the elderly—in addition to adults in their prime—were herded to the municipal jail by gendarmes pointing bayonets at them. From the jail, the whole group, consisting of seventy-nine people,¹⁷ was taken by train to Gyimesfelsőlök.¹⁸ There they were forced to cross the border into Romania in the wildest part of the Gyimes (Ghimeş) Mountains in the valley of the Ugra Creek. The Romanian border guards, however, drove all of them back. The younger members of the group fled into the dense forest, but a large part of the group was held in the woods along the border for six days without food or water, and every day the Hungarians attempted to push them back across the border to Romania. When it became obvious that the operation failed, the Jews were brought back to the municipal jail of Csíkszereda, on November 14. Some individuals from the group disappeared, never to be seen again, and there was no knowing whether they had fallen victim to cold, hunger, or wild animals, or had managed to escape.

Two days later, on November 16, a part of those kept in the local jail (thirteen families, altogether forty-two people) were forced to pay their train ticket, and were taken to Körösmező,¹⁹ situated on the Hungarian–Soviet border. The deportees arrived in Körösmező on November 21, 1940. There they were obliged to wait in the barracks used for housing

¹⁷ According to other sources, the group included eighty-one individuals. For details, see Arhivele Naționale ale României, Serviciul Județean Cluj, Fond Parchetul General al Curții de Apel [Romanian National Archives, Cluj County Service, Fond Prosecutor General of the Court of Appeal], file no. 3/1946, 74–75.

¹⁸ In Romanian: Lunca de Sus.

¹⁹ In Ukrainian: Jasyna.

border guards, next to the village. On December 5, the Hungarian military border guards separated family members into smaller groups. During the night, these groups were taken from the border guard stations at Páncékház and Mohelk through the Tatárhágó (Yablunyskyj Pass) to three different points on the border, and there they were forced to cross into Soviet territory.

Braving the five-foot-deep snow, the cold, and the cruelty of the Hungarian border guards, some of the deportees returned to Hungary, which they regarded as their motherland. These operations, which involved sending people across the Soviet border, lasted until December 9, when a Ministry of the Interior telegram²⁰ ordered the release of the members of the group. By that time, however, only four individuals remained in the barracks. Duly released on the following day, they were provided with proper papers and sent back to Csíkszereda.

Because of the intervention of family members left behind, an inquiry was ordered in the course of which it was established that six families had disappeared. It was surmised that, in the best case, they might have been captured by the Soviet border guards. It could not be ruled out, however, that many of these people had frozen to death while struggling with the deep snow and cold. It was also established that thirty-six individuals had been forced across the border, and twenty-one of them had disappeared. One corpse was found in the woods a few days later, but could not be identified.²¹

A few weeks later, Miklós Kozma, government commissioner in Carpatho-Ruthenia, ordered an inquiry.²² The comprehensive report of Arisztid Meskó, police commissioner of Ungvár, denied that a frozen body had been found in the forest. No investigation occurred, however, to determine whether Colonel Éder had ordered the deportations lawfully and what precise role the Ministry of the Interior and Defense had played in the scheme. Dr. Miklós Adler, the penultimate president of the Jewish Community of Csíkszereda, stated later that most of the missing individuals had perished

²⁰ The telegram was sent by the Ministry of the Interior to Kőrösmező following the interventions of Margit Slachta, founder of the Roman Catholic Order of the Sisters of Social Service, and of Gábor Pál, a lawyer of Csíkszereda and former member of the Hungarian parliament.

²¹ Zoltán Tibori Szabó, "Csík County," in *The Geographical Encyclopedia of the Holocaust in Hungary*, 3 vols., ed. Randolph L. Braham (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013), vol. 1, 302–4.

²² Miklós Kozma acted after a new intervention of Margit Slachta.

in the cold and snow. Only three of the expelled individuals ever returned from the East, and that was many years after the end of the war.²³

In Csík County, between 1940 and 1942, Hungarian authorities repeatedly rounded up hundreds of Jews living in Szekler settlements such as Bélbor, Borszék, Ditró, Csíkszentmárton, Csíkszentsimon, Galócás, Gyergyóbékás, Gyergyóhodos, Gyergyótölgyes, Gyimesbükk, Gyimesközéplak, and Szárhegy,²⁴ as well as in the towns of Csíkszereda and Gyergyószentmiklós,²⁵ deporting them to Galicia or resettling them in other towns of Northern Transylvania.

After the war, in 1946, Andrei Paul,²⁶ the public prosecutor of the People's Tribunal of Cluj, in an interview given to a Romanian newspaper, claimed that under the orders of Colonel Éder, approximately 400 Jews had been forcibly removed from Csíkszereda and other settlements of Csík County. The prosecutor asserted that those individuals had been taken to the border area of Máramaros²⁷ County under military escort and that they were transferred across the border to Soviet-controlled territory. According to Andrei Paul, approximately 200 Jews lost their lives as a result of Éder's deportation operations.²⁸

During the same period, in Maros-Torda²⁹ County, the expulsions affected 678 Jews and Romanians. Major Sándor Dobay of the gendarmerie and his armed band scoured many settlements situated between Nyárádtő³⁰ and Mezőszabad³¹ and publicly beat sixty to eighty men and women in each place in order to force them to cross the border to Romania. The military commander of Marosvásárhely,³² General Gyula Vida, also tried to persuade the Jews to leave Northern Transylvania. He withdrew from the Jews

²³ "Dr. Adler Miklós levele Vántsa Zoltán református lelkészhez" [Letter of Dr. Miklós Adler addressed to Reformed Priest Zoltán Vántsa], Csíkszereda [Miercurea Ciuc], February 1974, in *Voltak. Emlékezés a csíkszeredai zsidó közösségre*, 9–10.

²⁴ In Romanian: Bilbor, Borsec, Ditrău, Sânmartin, Sânsimion, Gălăuțaș, Bicăzul Ardelean, Hodoșa, Tulgheș, Ghimeș-Făget, Lunca de Jos, Lăzarea; today in Romania.

²⁵ In Romanian: Gheorgheni.

²⁶ Known by that time also as Endre Pollák.

²⁷ In Romanian: Maramureș.

²⁸ Gheorghe Isacu, "Comandamentele militare horthyste. Mijloc de samavolnicii în stil mare, cercetate de Tribunalul Poporului din Cluj" [The Horthyst military headquarters: Means of grand style lawlessness, investigated by the Cluj People's Tribunal], *Tribuna nouă* [Cluj] 100, March 1, 1946, 1–3.

²⁹ In Romanian: Mureș-Turda.

³⁰ In Romanian: Ungheeni.

³¹ In Romanian: Voiniceni.

³² In Romanian: Târgu-Mureș.

of Marosvásárhely fifty of their fifty-five licenses to trade in alcoholic beverages, and twenty-five of the total of twenty-seven tobacco shop permits.³³

Holocaust by Bullets: The Second Wave of Deportations

The deportations organized by the Hungarian military and civil authorities continued in 1941, thus affecting the entire territory of Northern Transylvania. Even before Hungary's entering into the war against the Soviet Union on June 27, 1941, the National Central Alien Control Authority (Külföldieket Ellenőrző Országos Központi Hatóság [KEOKH]) dramatically increased its activity, and prepared a plan to resettle the "alien" Jews in the Soviet territories in Galicia. The pretext for the expulsions was to remove the "Polish and Russian Jews," who infiltrated in Carpatho-Ruthenia after the occupation of Poland by Germany in 1939, and then following the German attack against the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941.

According to findings of carefully conducted research, the massive deportations plan was initiated by the end of June 1941 by Minister of Defense Károly Bartha and army chief of staff Henrik Werth, and then approved on July 1, 1941, by the Hungarian government, including prime minister Miklós Bárdossy. From the outset, the plan was embraced by Lieutenant Colonel Miklós Kozma, who became the Hungarian government commissioner of Carpatho-Ruthenia on September 12, 1940, as well as by other government officials.³⁴ There is no doubt that Regent Miklós Horthy knew about the plan, and supported the idea of the deportations.

The overall command for the implementation of this plan, which went beyond the territory of Carpatho-Ruthenia, was entrusted to Kozma. The legal framework for the expulsions consisted of a series of confidential decrees in obvious contradiction with basic Hungarian legislation, and was provided mainly by the KEOKH.³⁵

³³ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Serviciul Județean Cluj, Fond Parchetul General al Curții de Apel [Romanian National Archives, Cluj County Service, Fond Prosecutor General of the Court of Appeal], file no. 3/1946, 81.

³⁴ Ádám Gellért and János Gellért, "Az 1941. évi kőrösmezői deportálások. A kitoloncolásokat jóváhagyó minisztertanácsi döntés háttere" [The deportations from Kőrösmező in 1941. The background details of the ministerial decision] *Betekintő* [Budapest] 2 (2012), http://www.betekinto.hu/2012_2_gellert_gellert.

³⁵ Randolph L. Braham, "Historical Overview," in *The Geographical Encyclopedia of the Holocaust in Hungary*, 3 vols., ed. Randolph L. Braham (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013), vol. 1, xxiii–xxviii; see also Frojimovics, *I Have Been a Stranger*, 57–102.

On June 7, Kozma communicated his views about the urgency of the expulsion to the prime minister. His increased activity was also reflected by a series of follow-up meetings he held with the Minister of the Interior on June 10, with the prime minister on June 14, and with Miklós Horthy on June 21.³⁶ On July 10, 1941, just two weeks after Hungary's entry into the war against the Soviet Union, Kozma wrote a letter to Bárdossy, informing him that, within one week, he would start the operation of expulsion of "Galician Jews, exposed Ukrainian agitators and Gypsies" across the border.³⁷

As a consequence, a number of individuals, belonging to the Jewish population of just about every Northern Transylvanian settlement, were herded together, declared "alien" or of "uncertain citizenship," and subsequently deported by the authorities. The great majority of the Northern Transylvanian deportees were from the northeastern part of the region, namely from counties such as Szatmár,³⁸ Ugocsa,³⁹ Máramaros, and Beszterce-Naszód,⁴⁰ which housed the poorest Jewish population of Transylvania, including around 25,000 Hasidic Jews. Roundups occurred also in other counties of Northern Transylvania, including the Szekler counties (Csík, Háromszék,⁴¹ Maros-Torda, and Udvarhely⁴²). Many of the individuals subjected to these inhumane measures were born in Hungary, but were unable to prove their Hungarian citizenship, either because the authorities refused to release the necessary documents to them, or because these documents were simply not available. Between March and August 1941 significant masses of Jews were rounded up and transported by freight cars to Kőrösmező. From there, they were transported by the SS with trucks across the border to Kolomea⁴³ at a rate of about 1,000 people per day, and eventually to the Kamianets-Podilskyi area. The great majority of the deportees were subjected to mass killings

³⁶ George Eisen and Tamás Stark, "The 1941 Galician Deportation and the Kamienets-Podolsk Massacre: A Prologue to the Hungarian Holocaust," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 27.2 (2013): 219.

³⁷ Mária Ormos, *Egy magyar médiavezér: Kozma Miklós* [A Hungarian media leader: Miklós Kozma], 2 vols. (Budapest: PolgART, 2000), vol. 2, 758.

³⁸ In Romanian: Satu-Mare.

³⁹ In Romanian: Ugocsa.

⁴⁰ In Romanian: Bistrița.

⁴¹ In Romanian: Trei Scaune.

⁴² In Romanian: Odorhei.

⁴³ In Ukrainian: Kolomyia; in Polish: Kołomyja; in Romanian: Colomeea.

in Galicia, and perished during the “Holocaust by bullets” phase of the tragedy that befell the Hungarian Jewry during the Second World War.⁴⁴

One of the first groups reportedly rounded up in Máramaros County in 1941 was that of the Jews of Borsa.⁴⁵ On the evening of April 30, they were forced to cross the Carpathian Mountains and flee to Romania. They fell victim to the freezing cold, hunger, fatigue or wild animals and, as a result, twenty-four of them perished in the mountains.⁴⁶

During the summer of 1941, 400 Jews from Tiszakarácsonyfalva⁴⁷ were entrained and deported to Lazeshchyna⁴⁸ in Galicia. The majority perished in the massacres carried out in several locations near Kamianets-Podilskiy on August 27–28, 1941. Those who survived the massacres were killed during the fall of 1941 in the ghettos of Stanisławów⁴⁹ and Horodenka. Only six members of the community survived according to

⁴⁴ Details regarding the roundups, deportations, and massacres were published in important scholarly volumes and studies, as follows: Randolph L. Braham, “The Kamenets Podolsk and Délvidék Massacres: Prelude to the Holocaust in Hungary,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 9 (1973): 133–56; Majsai Tamás, “A körösmezei deportálás 1941-ben” [The deportations to Yasinia in 1941], *A Ráday Gyűjtemény Évkönyve* [Budapest] 4–5 (1984–85): 59–86; Majsai Tamás, “A magyar Holocaust első felvonása, 1941” [The first act of the Hungarian Holocaust], in *Holocaust emlékkönyv a vidéki zsidóság deportálásának 50. évfordulóján* [Holocaust memorial book on the fiftieth commemoration of the deportation of the rural Jewry] (Budapest: Teljes Evangéliumi Diák és Ifjúsági Szövetség–TEDISZ, 1994), 303–9; Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Ormos, *Egy magyar médiavezér*, vol. 2, 753–67; Karsai, *Holokauszt*, 228–32; Christian Gerlach and Götz Aly, *Az utolsó fejezet. A magyar zsidók legyilkolása* [The last chapter: The murder of the Hungarian Jews] (Budapest: Noran-Kiadó, 2005, 71–77; Frojmovics, *I Have Been a Stranger*, 57–102; Randolph L. Braham and Zoltán Tibori Szabó, eds., *Az észak-erdélyi holokauszt földrajzi enciklopédiája* [The geographical encyclopedia of the Northern Transylvanian Holocaust] (Budapest: Park Kiadó; Cluj-Napoca: Koinónia, 2008); Géza Komoróczy, *A zsidók története Magyarországon* [The History of Jews in Hungary], 2 vols. (Pozsony: Kalligram, 2012), vol. 2, 619–29; Braham, “Historical Overview,” vol. 1, xxiii–xxviii.

⁴⁵ In Romanian: Borșa.

⁴⁶ Arhivele Naționale ale României, Serviciul Județean Cluj, Fond Parchetul General al Curții de Apel [Romanian National Archives, Cluj County Service, Fond Prosecutor General of the Court of Appeal], file no. 3/1946, 180.

⁴⁷ In Romanian: Crăciunești, in Ukrainian: Kritsiniv; in Yiddish: Kretsniif; today in Romania.

⁴⁸ In Hungarian: Mezőhát, in Ukrainian: Lazescsina; today in Ukraine.

⁴⁹ In Hungarian: Sztaniszlau; in German: Stanislaw; in Ukrainian: Stanislaviv; in Polish: Stanisławów.

one source,⁵⁰ and the remnants of eight families according to another.⁵¹ Another 450 Jews were deported in 1941 from Máramarosziget.⁵² Furthermore, during a single day, on July 15, 1941, 300 Jews from Szatmár County were deported.⁵³ The total number of Jews deported during the summer of 1941 from Szatmárnémeti⁵⁴ was close to 1,000.⁵⁵ There is also data about deportations from Dés,⁵⁶ Szamosújvár,⁵⁷ Zilah,⁵⁸ Kolozsvár,⁵⁹ Marosvásárhely, and several other important cities. According to a Romanian source, they were another part of the total of 2,000 Jews deported during 1941 from Northern Transylvania to Galicia by the Hungarian authorities.⁶⁰

A typical example of what happened to the Jews of Máramaros in 1941 is that of the community of Felsőapsa⁶¹ numbering 1,289 Jews. In July 1941, all Jewish inhabitants were herded by the gendarmes to the local school, and during three days their documents were investigated. Two-thirds of them were declared stateless, and were sent on foot to the railway

⁵⁰ Kallós Miklós, "Már 1941-ben deportáltak és kiirtottak 400 máramarosi zsidót" [By 1941, 400 Jews from Máramaros were deported and exterminated], *Egység* [Kolozsvár/Cluj] 3.108, June 11, 1948, 5.

⁵¹ According to Frojimovics, the number of Jews deported from Tiszakarácsonyfalva was 496, and only the remnants of eight families survived the massacres. For details, see Kinga Frojimovics, "Máramaros vármegye" [Máramaros County], in *Az észak-erdélyi holokauszt földrajzi enciklopédiája* [The geographical encyclopedia of the Northern Transylvanian Holocaust], ed. Randolph L. Braham and Zoltán Tibori Szabó (Budapest: Park Kiadó; Cluj-Napoca: Koinónia, 2008), 254–55.

⁵² In Romanian: Sighetu Marmăției.

⁵³ Ágnes Hegyi and Dániel Löwy, "Szatmár vármegye" [Szatmár County], in *Az észak-erdélyi holokauszt földrajzi enciklopédiája* [The geographical encyclopedia of the Northern Transylvanian Holocaust], ed. Randolph L. Braham and Zoltán Tibori Szabó (Budapest: Park Kiadó; Cluj-Napoca: Koinónia, 2008), 305.

⁵⁴ In Romanian: Satu Mare.

⁵⁵ Hegyi and Löwy, "Szatmár vármegye," 350.

⁵⁶ In Romanian: Dej.

⁵⁷ In Romanian: Gherla.

⁵⁸ In Romanian: Zalău.

⁵⁹ In Romanian: Cluj.

⁶⁰ Bodea, *Tragedia evreilor*, 67; see also: Arhivele Naționale ale României, Serviciul Județean Cluj, Fond Parchetul General al Curții de Apel [Romanian National Archives, Cluj County Service, Fond Prosecutor General of Court of Appeal], file no. 3/1946, 173–180; the total number of the deported Jews was reportedly much higher.

⁶¹ In Ukrainian: Verhnye Vogyane; in Romanian: Apsa de Sus; in Yiddish: Ober-Apsa.

station of the neighboring Kisbocskó.⁶² There they were entrained and transported to Kőrösmező, and then again by train over the border to the German-occupied Horodenka. From there they continued their journey to the east on foot, without water and food, over the Dniester River in Transnistria, to Tluste. Many members of the community died en route because of the forced march or due to the brutality of their Ukrainian militia guards. After a few days, they were sent to Jazłowiec, where the group was split into two parts. One group was sent to Kamianets-Podilskyi and became victim of the mass killings organized by the German SS and Ukrainian militias on August 27–28. A large part of the second group ended up in the Ukrainian Jewish ghettos, and shared their fate, while the rest of this group gradually returned to Felsőapsa in September. One year later, in the fall of 1942, on the day of Rosh Hashanah, the gendarmes broke into the local synagogue and rechecked everyone's papers. Those declared stateless once again were deported for the second time to Galicia, and this time no one returned. A report of April 1944 stated that the religious community also ceased to exist, because in 1941 80 percent of its members perished in Galicia, including the rabbi; only the ritual slaughterer remained in Felsőapsa.⁶³

From Alsóapsa,⁶⁴ 217 Jews were deported to Galicia; most of them were murdered near Kamianets-Podilskyi, others were taken to the Stanisławów ghetto and killed during the fall of 1941.⁶⁵ The same fate befell the two-third majority of the 994 Jews of Bustyaháza,⁶⁶ but also many other Jews from the northern counties of Northern Transylvania. The murder of the 120 Jews of Dombó⁶⁷ was eyewitnessed by a soldier who later informed the members of the local Jewish community about the killings.

Between July 15 and August 9, 17,306 individuals were deported to Kőrösmező, and 15,567 of them were transported to Galicia. After August 1, the Galician territories east of Kőrösmező came under the administra-

⁶² In Romanian: Bocicoiel.

⁶³ Frojimovics, "Máramaros vármegye," 195–96; Frojimovics, *I Have Been a Stranger*, 114, 117.

⁶⁴ In Ukrainian: Nyidzsnya Apsha; in Romanian: Apșa de Jos; in Yiddish: Unter-Apsa.

⁶⁵ DEGOB database, Testimony no. 129, June 21, 1945; for details, see <http://www.degob.hu/index.php?showjk=129>.

⁶⁶ In Ukrainian: Bustino; in Romanian: Bustea.

⁶⁷ In Ukrainian: Dubove; in Romanian: Dâmbu.

tion of the German military forces. Yielding to German demands,⁶⁸ on August 8, Minister of the Interior Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer issued an order to stop the deportations, but the deportation of Jews to the area was nevertheless continued by the Hungarian army. By the end of August, approximately 3,000 more Jews had been handed over to the SS in Galicia. The action was temporarily suspended only by the end of August 1941, but was resumed during the following month and was stopped only by the end of 1942. During 1941 and 1942, the total number of victims subjected to deportation was higher than 20,000.⁶⁹

The Hungarian army transported the deportees to Transnistria and handed them over to the German military. On August 27–28, 1941, 23,600 deported Jews, the overwhelming majority (10,000 to 15,000 people) coming from Hungary, were massacred by the 320th SS-Police battalion, belonging to Einsatzgruppe C, under the command of SS-Obergruppenführer Friedrich August Jeckeln. Among the victims were also many local Jews rounded up in the Kolomea, respectively the Kamianets-Podilskyi area.⁷⁰

Many of the victims were buried alive. In his report, Jeckeln affirmed that the total number of Jews shot at Kamianets-Podilskyi was 23,600. This was the first five-digit massacre of the Nazis' Final Solution program. According to Braham, of the 18,000 or so deportees from Hungary, approximately 2,000 survived.⁷¹

Following an investigation initiated by Zoltán Szirtes in 1998, the Criminal Division of the Hungarian Police HQ concluded that the Kamianets-Podilskyi deportations and mass murders were jointly organized by the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Defense, and con-

⁶⁸ German military forces were unprepared for the mass deportation of the Jews from Hungary, including Carpatho-Ruthenia and Northern Transylvania, as they protested similarly to the Romanian army for the “unorganized” mass murders of the Jews deported to Bessarabia and Transnistria from Romanian territories. Hungary refused to take back the deported Jews who survived the massacres and adopted severe measures to prevent their return in Hungary. For details, see Ádám Gellért and János Gellért, “Menekülés a népirtás elől. Az 1941-es deportáltak hazatérési kísérletei és a magyar állam ellenintézkedései,” *Betekintő* [Budapest] 3 (2013), http://www.betekinto.hu/2013_3_gellert_gellert.

⁶⁹ Kinga Frojimovics, “A galíciai deportálások” [The deportations to Galicia], *Népszabadság* (Budapest), February 1, 2014; for details, see Kinga Frojimovici, http://nol.hu/lap/hetvege/20140201-a_galiciai_deportalasok-1441753.

⁷⁰ Frojimovics, *I Have Been a Stranger*, 129.

⁷¹ Braham, “Historical Overview,” vol. 1, xxviii.

stituted “the first stage of the Hungarian Holocaust.” Accordingly, ninety-one individuals were identified as responsible for the tragedy because of their decisions and actions; ninety were already dead, and one of them died during the investigations. Consequently, nobody faced a trial for these crimes.⁷²

The deportations continued in 1942. “Stateless Jews” were rounded up in different parts of the Northern Transylvanian region and sent to Galicia. By the end of 1942 over 16,000 of the total of more than 20,000 Jews deported from Hungary were shot in the head, machine-gunned into mass graves, mutilated, thrown into the Dniester River, or killed by other means. These deportations, ordered from Budapest, generated a total of 4,000 to 5,000 Jewish victims from Northern Transylvania. This was the first big mass murder of the Shoah.

Extermination by Forced Labor, Hunger and Disease: The Third Phase of the Genocide

Labor service existed in Hungary even before the re-annexation of Northern Transylvania in August 1940. Nonetheless, after the re-annexation and especially after Hungary’s involvement in the German war against Yugoslavia, the status of the labor service system took a turn for the worse.

The Decree of the Ministry of the Interior No. 2870/1941-ME, signed by Prime Minister László Bárdossy on April 16, 1941, affected all the Jews of military age who were forced to serve an “auxiliary labor service” of two years.

The Hungarian Second Army, consisting of 250,000 men under the command of General Gusztáv Jányi, left Hungary early in April 1942, accompanied by around 50,000 labor servicemen. The latter were later involved in a variety of works and projects of interest to the Hungarian and German armies in Ukraine, starting with road and railroad maintenance, clearing and construction, and ending with the removal of mines from the fields. The living and working conditions of the labor servicemen were extremely bad due to the virulent antisemitic attitude of numerous

⁷² Zsuzsa Korn Horváth, “Adalék a magyar holokauszt első szakaszának történetéhez és a Bárdossy-kormány felelősségéhez” [Contribution to the history of the first phase of the Holocaust in Hungary and the responsibility of the Bárdossy government], *Élet és Irodalom* [Budapest] 46.1, January 7, 2000.

company commanders and guards, and the lack of quality nutrition and medical treatment.⁷³

In the summer of 1942, the call-up of Jewish men from Northern Transylvania for labor service began. Around 15,000 Northern Transylvanian Jewish labor servicemen were sent first to Hungarian labor camps and then to the front lines in Ukraine. We know from the recollections published in the Yizkor literature that due to inhumane treatment, insufficient food, disease, mass murders, and war injuries, a great number of them never returned home.

In particular, Northern Transylvanian Jewish labor servicemen were killed in Dorosics where on the morning of April 29, 1943, the Hungarian military set the epidemic typhoid field hospital on fire.⁷⁴ As a result, 478 of its 670 seriously ill inmates burned alive, and out of those who tried to escape 56 were machine-gunned by Hungarian soldiers. Out of the 136 severely injured, 80 died later in the military hospital of Korosteny.⁷⁵ Reportedly, among the victims of this massacre were also Northern Transylvanian Jewish servicemen from Kolozs,⁷⁶ Bihar,⁷⁷ and Udvarhely counties.

Among other mass murders involving Jewish labor servicemen, one that was especially cruel happened in September 1944, in Leordina,⁷⁸ a village in Máramaros County. After the deportation of the local Jews to Auschwitz-Birkenau, several labor service companies constituted of Jewish and Romanian labor servicemen arrived in the surroundings of Leordina. Their commandant, Lieutenant Colonel Antal Keren, planned to kill all the labor servicemen by placing mines under the road they were working

⁷³ Braham, "Historical Overview," vol. 1, xxxiv. An overview of the Hungarian labor service system is offered by Braham. See: Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*; Hungarian version: Braham, *A népiértés politikája*, 287–370; see also Randolph L. Braham, ed., *The Wartime System of Labor Service in Hungary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

⁷⁴ According to other sources, the massacre took place on April 30, 1943, and the total number of the quarantine facility's inmates was approximately 800. See Braham, "Historical Overview," vol. 1, xxxvi.

⁷⁵ For details, see Béla Katona, *Várad a viharban* [Várad in the storm] (Nagyvárad [Oradea]: TEALA Kórháztámogató Egyesület, [1946]), 75; see also: Dániel Lőwy, "Valójában mi is történt Dorosicsban? A hetven évvel ezelőtti vizsgálat megbízhatósága" [What really happened in Dorosics? The reliability of the investigation carried out seventy years ago], *Kritika* [Budapest] 43.1–2 (2014): 2–6; see also http://nol.hu/kritika/20140226-valojaban_mi_is_tortent_dorosicsban.

⁷⁶ In Romanian: Cluj.

⁷⁷ In Romanian: Bihar.

⁷⁸ In Romanian also Leordina; in Yiddish: Lerdina.

on. The servicemen found out about the plan, fled to neighboring settlements, and eventually many of them gathered in Leordina. Lt. Col. Keren surrounded the village, set it on fire, and burned it to the ground. Approximately 100 Jewish and 300 Romanian labor servicemen were killed.⁷⁹

By the end of the war, many of the Northern Transylvanian Jewish labor servicemen were taken prisoners by the Soviets,⁸⁰ and the majority of them died in Soviet captivity, especially in its forced labor camps. Research has shown that more people died in Soviet captivity than on the battlefields.⁸¹ Unfortunately, a total figure of the Northern Transylvanian Jews who lost their lives because of the Hungarian labor service system is unavailable.⁸² The same is true for the casualties of the Soviet labor service system.

Gas Chambers, Cremation, and Slave Labor: The Total Destruction Phase

By 1943, the Kállay government fully understood that the Germans were losing the war and gradually tried to establish contacts with the Western Allied forces. These efforts, however, did not escape the attention of the Germans.

⁷⁹ Kinga Frojimovics, "Máramaros County and the Máramaros Administrative District," in *The Geographical Encyclopedia of the Holocaust in Hungary*, 3 vols., ed. Randolph L. Braham (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 597.

⁸⁰ One of them, Sándor Mihály, spent six and half years in Soviet captivity. He became a prisoner in 1941, and was freed in 1947. Mihály, born in the small village of Szilágyzovány (in Romanian: Zăuan) in 1919, described his ordeal in his book (Mihály Sándor, *Az ellopott fiatalság* [The stolen youth] [Kolozsvár [Cluj]: Incitato Typography, 2008]). Another survivor of both the Holocaust and the Gulag is Mihai Eisikovits, who spent three years in a Hungarian labor service battalion, then more than four years in Soviet labor camps, returning in his home city of Szamosújvár (in Romanian: Gherla) only in August 1948. For details, see Andrea Ghiță, "Mihai Eisikovits: o victimă a Holocaustului și apoi a Gulagului" [Mihai Eisikovits: a victim of both the Holocaust and the Gulag], *Acum*, December 12, 2010, <http://acum.tv/articol/21957/>; see also "Eisikovits Mihály, Nagybánya, Románia," *Centropa*, <http://www.centropa.org/hu/biography/eisikovits-mihaly>.

⁸¹ For further details see Stark Tamás, "Magyarország háborús embervesztesége," <http://www.rev.hu/sulinet45/szerviz/szakirod/stark.htm>.

⁸² See International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, "Final Report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania," presented to Romanian President Ion Iliescu, November 11, 2004, Bucharest, Romania, <http://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/20080226-romania-commission-transylvania.pdf>

Adolf Hitler was determined to prevent at all costs the extrication of Hungary from the Axis and in order to avoid the repetition of the Italian defection decided to invade Hungary. By the middle of March 1944, Regent Miklós Horthy was invited to a meeting with the Führer in Schloss Klessheim, near Salzburg.

During the German–Hungarian negotiations, held on March 17–18, German military forces launched Operation Margarethe against Hungary. In Schloss Klessheim, Horthy personally negotiated with Hitler, but he had to yield to his arguments and eventually agreed to hand over to the Third Reich up to 300,000 Hungarian Jews “for war production purposes.”⁸³

The Germans (Wehrmacht, Gestapo, SS, SD, SIPO) invaded Hungary on March 19, 1944. After arriving back in Budapest, Horthy appointed a new pro-Nazi government on March 22. Prime minister Döme Sztójay, the former Hungarian ambassador in Berlin, subordinated the main instruments of state power (police, gendarmerie, and civil servants) to the Germans.

The Schloss Klessheim agreement constituted the fundament of the implementation of the Nazi Final Solution plans in Hungary. SS-Obersturmbannführer Adolf Eichmann arrived immediately in Budapest with his Special Commando (Sonderkommando) of approximately 100 men. His purpose was to quickly implement the Final Solution plans developed in Germany.

Two key figures were appointed as state secretaries of the Hungarian Ministry of the Interior: László Baký (political state secretary) and László Endre (administrative state secretary). Both were pro-Nazi politicians, who, together with Lieutenant Colonel László Ferenczy, the gendarmerie officer in charge of deportations, were very enthusiastic supporters of the deportations.

The anti-Jewish drive started in force on April 7, when Baký signed Decree No. 6163/1944.res, a legal act detailing the procedures of roundup, concentration, ghettoization, and deportation of the Jews. This decree was the result of the German–Hungarian meeting at the ministry of the interior on April 4, when the details of the expropriation, ghettoization, and deportation process of the Jews were elaborated. The details of the whole operation were formulated in a series of highly confidential decrees and subsequent application instructions.

⁸³ Braham, “Historical Overview,” vol. 1, xlv.

Eichmann was surprised by the support he received from the newly appointed Hungarian puppet government and from its pro-Nazi members, who, from the first moment onwards, proved to be very eager to start and rapidly execute the deportation program.

Because of tactical and technical reasons, the country was divided into ten gendarmerie districts organized into six operational zones. Most of the territory of Northern Transylvania constituted Operational Zone II, encompassing Gendarmerie District IX (Beszterce-Naszód, Kolozs, Szatmár, Szilágy,⁸⁴ Szolnok-Doboka⁸⁵ counties, and the eastern part of Bihar County) and Gendarmerie District X (Csík, Háromszék, Maros-Torda, and Udvarhely counties). Máramaros and Ugocsa counties were part of the Operational Zone I, encompassing only Gendarmerie District VIII. Colonel Tibor Paksy-Kiss was entrusted with the anti-Jewish campaign in Operational Zone II, while Colonel Győző Tölgyessy was responsible for Operational Zone I.

In order to offer an acceptable explanation for the mass evacuation of the Jews, Northern Transylvania and Carpatho-Ruthenia were declared military operational zones.⁸⁶ Béla Ricsóy-Uhlarik was appointed as government commissioner of the Northern Transylvanian military operational zone. In the meantime, the authorities spread the information that the “Jewish workers” who were supposed to be sent to Germany would be allowed to be accompanied by their families. They did this in order to increase their feelings of safety and to maximize their working performance within the enterprises of the German war industry. This information was also enforced by very cynical statements of Sztójay and Horthy.⁸⁷

The Germans arrived in the Northern Transylvanian counties by the end of March and immediately arrested—as they did in Budapest and other Hungarian cities—the most influential and wealthiest Jews, together with the leftist ones. At least 150 individuals were arrested in Kolozsvár, 50 in Nagybánya,⁸⁸ and other hundreds were rounded up in Nagyvárad,⁸⁹ Marosvásárhely, Szatmárnémeti, Beszterce, and other cities, and were interned in Hungarian concentration camps.

⁸⁴ In Romanian: Sălaj.

⁸⁵ In Romanian: Solnoc-Dăbâca.

⁸⁶ Decree No. 1440/1944. M. E., April 12, 1944 (retroactive, starting with April 1; M. E. = decree of the prime minister).

⁸⁷ For further details, see Braham, *A népiertás politikája*, 388–89, 393.

⁸⁸ In Romanian: Baia Mare.

⁸⁹ In Romanian: Oradea.

The robbery of the Jewish valuables and the deportation of Jews was organized in a far more “efficient and professional” manner than during the first and second phases of the Northern Transylvanian Holocaust. Starting with April 1944, Hungarian government regulations, aimed at the complete despoliation and expropriation of the Jewry, were put into effect in Northern Transylvania. On April 6, the ministry of the interior issued the confidential Decree No. 6138/1944. VI. res. B.M. that instructed all the police departments of the country to take immediate and effective measures to prevent Jews from hiding jewelry and other valuables, selling them privately, or giving them to Christian friends for safekeeping.⁹⁰ Residents who counted as Jewish under racial laws were excluded from professional organizations,⁹¹ fired from public institutions⁹² and privately owned companies,⁹³ forbidden to own and operate pharmacies,⁹⁴ and gradually deprived of the most valuable of their belongings. An entire series of decrees stipulated that Jews were not allowed to have and use telephones, to own radio receivers and listen to foreign radio broadcasts,⁹⁵ to own firearms,⁹⁶ road vehicles,⁹⁷ to employ non-Jews in their household,⁹⁸ to possess publishing companies⁹⁹ or educational institutions,¹⁰⁰ etc.

Moreover, they were not allowed to travel,¹⁰¹ to enter the shops, to socialize with non-Jews, and starting with April 5, all Jews older than 6 were forced to wear on the left side of their chest a canary-yellow Star of David of 10 by 10 centimeters in size.¹⁰² Jewish private property, com-

⁹⁰ Braham, “Historical Overview,” vol. 1, lv.

⁹¹ Decree No. 1220/1944. M. E., March 29, 1944.

⁹² Decree No. 1210/1944. M. E., March 29, 1944.

⁹³ Decree No. 1540/1944. M. E., April 21, 1944.

⁹⁴ Decree No. 1370/1944. M. E., April 12, 1944.

⁹⁵ Decree No. 1490/1944. M. E., April 18, 1944; Decree No. 217.300/1944. K. K. M. of the Minister of Commerce and Transportation, April 19, 1944; Decree No. 33.000. el. 18/1944. of the Minister of National Defense, April 20, 1944.

⁹⁶ Decree No. 1630/1944. M. E., April 26, 1944.

⁹⁷ Decree No. 1230/1944. M. E., March 29, 1944.

⁹⁸ Decree No. 1200/1944. M. E., March 29, 1944.

⁹⁹ Decree No. 10.740/1944. M. E., April 27, 1944.

¹⁰⁰ Decree No. 8.960/1944. V. K. M. of the Minister of Religious Affairs and Education, May 11, 1944.

¹⁰¹ Decree No. 1270/1944. M. E., April 5, 1944.

¹⁰² Decree No. 1240/1944. M. E., March 20, 1944 (judging by its number, issued probably on March 30, 1944).

mercial inventories, machinery and equipment were all seized,¹⁰³ the food supply (ration) for Jews was reduced,¹⁰⁴ and Jewish students were forbidden to wear school uniforms.¹⁰⁵

The local authorities were ordered to cooperate with Jewish organizations to prepare a comprehensive register of the Jewish population. On April 27, the minister of public supply ordered by decree¹⁰⁶ that by May 1 all Jews are supposed to submit their personal data to the mayor's office of their settlement, in order to obtain their new food allocation documents. All these lists served later as basic inventories to round up every single Jewish person living in Northern Transylvania. The Jews, of course, were unaware of the real purpose of these orders.

Eventually, on April 26, prime minister Sztójay issued a decree, containing "certain regulatory issues concerning the housing and the designation of the residence of Jews,"¹⁰⁷ which was in fact a legal act permitting the ghettoization of the entire Jewish population. Jews—who complied with all the above-mentioned orders and decrees—had to hand over their last jewels, valuables, and cash. As soon as the Jews were rounded up, leaving their houses and apartments involuntarily, looting of their belongings began. Officials who were supposed to take over the Jewish flats and to draw up their inventory picked up the most valuable assets. Later, apartments were looted by Hungarian and German military personnel, as well as by greedy civilians.

The details of the ghettoization of the Northern Transylvanian Jews were further developed and presented to the local authorities and law enforcement officials of the two operational zones on the occasion of three conferences.

The first took place on April 12, 1944, in Munkács,¹⁰⁸ even though the decree prescribing the establishment of the ghettos became effec-

¹⁰³ Decree No. 1600/1944. M. E., April 14, 1944; Decree No. 50.500/1944. K. K. M. of the Minister of Commerce and Transportation, April 20, 1944; Decree No. 1.077/1944. P. M. of the Minister of Finance, April 28, 1944.

¹⁰⁴ Decree No. 108.500/1944. K. M. of the Minister of Public Supply, April 22, 1944; Decree No. 108.000/1944. K. M. of the Minister of Public Supply

¹⁰⁵ Decree No. 8830/1944. V. K. M. of the Minister of Religious Affairs and Education, May 2, 1944; Decree No. 8.700/1944. V. K. M. of the Minister of Religious Affairs and Education, May 4, 1944.

¹⁰⁶ Decree No. 108.510/1944. K. M. of the Minister of Public Supply, April 27, 1944.

¹⁰⁷ Decree No. 1610/1944. M. E., April 26, 1944.

¹⁰⁸ In Ukrainian: Munkatseve; in Romanian: Munceag; in Yiddish: Minkats.

tive only on April 28, 1944. This meeting detailed the measures to be enforced in each county—including Máramaros County—and decided that the ghettoization process would start on Sunday, April 16, the last day of Passover. The second conference was organized on April 26, in Szatmárnémeti, and clarified the details of ghettoization in the counties of Genadarmerie District IX, including Beszterce-Naszód, Bihar, Kolozs, Szatmár, Szilágy, and Szolnok-Doboka. And the third, held in Marosvásárhely on April 28, was dedicated to the roundup and concentration of the Jews living in the Szekler Land area, on the territory of Gendarmerie District X, namely in Csik, Háromszék, Maros-Torda, and Udvarhely counties.

The conferences were held under the chairmanship of State Secretary László Endre who personally spoke with the local officials (prefects, deputy prefects, mayors, leading officers of the gendarmerie and police, and other officials), giving them oral instructions about the methods and means to be used during the roundup, concentration, and ghettoization of the Jewish population. Based on the written instructions of State Secretary László Baký, the participants determined the location of the concentration spots and ghettos in each area, and established the teams, squads, and commissions in charge with the roundups, and with the identification and confiscation of the Jewish valuables and wealth. Endre also instructed the participants to concentrate the Jews in the Jewish quarters of the different settlements, but also in nonoperational or abandoned factories, brickyards, farms, empty warehouses, as well as in Jewish schools, community buildings, synagogues, or under the open sky. Jewish private property, commercial inventories, machinery and equipment were all seized, and eventually Jews had to hand over their last valuables and cash.

The ghettoization drive started in Operational Zone I on April 16, and in Operational Zone II on May 3, 1944. Consequently, on April 16, 1944, the Jews of Máramaros and Ugocsa County were rounded up and isolated. On May 3, 1944, the concentration of the Jewish population started in all other Northern Transylvanian counties. The roundups and the isolation and ghettoization actions were carried out by the gendarmerie and the police forces, together with local civil servants and extremist organization members.

The conditions in the concentration areas and ghettos were extremely harsh and inhumane. Overcrowding, hunger, lack of water, hygiene possibilities, and sanitary conditions, as well as daily tortures caused many tensions and incidents. Gendarmes and detectives cruelly tortured—usually in front of their family members—many of the inmates to force them

to confess the hiding place of their valuables. Many people committed suicide, died because of the barbaric tortures or as a result of various untreated diseases.

The expropriation, isolation, concentration, and deportation of the Northern Transylvanian Jewry took less than two months. After enduring the ghettos for weeks, the Jews were crammed, under inhumane conditions, into cattle cars, and deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Between the end of April and the first days of June, at least 135,000 Jews were deported. By June 10, Northern Transylvania was already *judenrein*.

The first transport of Hungarian Jews left for Auschwitz on April 28, 1944, and large-scale deportation started on May 14, 1944.¹⁰⁹ According to other sources, the first train began its tragic journey from Máramarosziget, crossed the Hungarian border on May 16 at Kassa,¹¹⁰ transporting, under astounding circumstances, 3,007 individuals. The last transport from Northern Transylvania departed from Nagyvárad¹¹¹ on June 26, transporting 2,819 people to Auschwitz-Birkenau. The main concentration settlements, the concentration sequences, as well as the ghettos and entrainment points are presented in Table 1.

After the arrival of the trains in Auschwitz-Birkenau, the SS performed a selection of the new inmates, followed by the mass murder in gas chambers of the women, children, and the elderly. Their bodies were eventually cremated. Those deportees who had been found fit to work were sent into other death and/or labor camps in German-occupied Poland, Latvia, Austria or Germany, where they were forced to work in German labor camps and factories and subsequently starved to death. No more than 35,000 to 40,000 of the 165,000-strong Jewish population of Northern Transylvania survived the camps; the total number of deaths is therefore estimated at 125,000 to 130,000.

A relatively small number of Northern Transylvanian Jews fled to Romania. The main crossing points on the Hungarian–Romanian border were in the surroundings of Kolozsvár and Nagyvárad. The total number of Jews who escaped to Romania is estimated to at most 6,000 to 7,000,

¹⁰⁹ Yehuda Bauer, *Jews for Sale? Nazi-Jewish Negotiations, 1933–1945* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 156. According to Eugene Hollander, he was deported from the ghetto of Técső on April 27, 1944, and arrived in Auschwitz three days later, on Sunday, April 30. For details, see Eugene Hollander, *From the Hell of the Holocaust: A Survivor's Story* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 2000), 33–36.

¹¹⁰ In Slovakian: Košice; today in Slovakia.

¹¹¹ In Romanian: Oradea; today in Romania.

out of which around 4,000 might have been Northern Transylvanians. A group of 388 persons managed to get on board of the so-called Kastner train that transported a total of 1,684 Hungarian Jews to a special camp in Bergen-Belsen. Most of them paid the Germans to spare their lives, and in between August and December 1944 the whole group ended up in Switzerland.

After their liberation, a large number of Northern Transylvanian survivors of the German extermination camps did not return to their birthplaces, leaving instead for Western countries or for Palestine; those who did return began leaving en masse Romania in the late 1940s.

The Holocaust in Southern Transylvania

According to the Second Vienna Award, Southern Transylvania,¹¹² together with approximately 42,000 Jews living in this area,¹¹³ remained under Romanian rule. The Jewish population of Romania was subjected to antisemitic laws as early as 1936. Just days before the Second Vienna Award, on August 8, 1940, Decree Law No. 2650 (also called Statute of the Jews) was signed by King Carol II. This legal act—based on Nazi-type racism—excluded the Jews from Romanian society and transformed them into second-class citizens. For legal purposes, Jews who converted to Christian religions were nonetheless regarded as Jews, and nonreligious Jews were defined as “Jews by blood.”

After the National Legionary State took power on September 6, 1940, the Romanian government issued a large number of legal acts with strong antisemitic intent. Jews were deprived of their enterprises and other belongings, excluded from military service, and—starting in December 1940—they were incorporated in labor battalions and forced to work in the public interest under the authority of the Ministry of National Defense. The working conditions in the camps were harsh and the commanders were merciless. The conditions in the forced labor camp of Pâncota,¹¹⁴ 40 kilometers east of Arad, were extremely bad and cruel, beatings and torture being daily occurrences. Most of the Southern

¹¹² Southern Transylvania included the southern part of the historic Transylvania, but also the Banat, the town of Arad and its surroundings.

¹¹³ The great majority of the Jews living in Southern Transylvania were of Hungarian culture and mother tongue.

¹¹⁴ In Hungarian: Páncota.

Transylvanian Jews worked in Oltenia, at Filiași and Piatra Olt, but also near Focșani, in the southern part of Moldova. Others were taken to forced labor camps to Ghioroc,¹¹⁵ in Arad County, in the Chizătău-Șanovița¹¹⁶ area (northeast of Lugoj¹¹⁷), to Predeal, Făgăraș,¹¹⁸ Boju,¹¹⁹ and Cânepiști,¹²⁰ the latter two being next to the Northern Transylvanian border.¹²¹

In August 1942, the Jews from Romania who had a communist or leftist orientation, together with those who filed visa requests to the Soviet Union (in order to emigrate to the United States), were sent to the Vapniarca concentration camp, in Transnistria. On September 17, 1942, their number was nearly 1,200, and several hundred of them came from Southern Transylvanian settlements.¹²² Many of them perished there or in other camps. For example, those deported from the Arad and Banat regions were subjected to a selection in Tiraspol and divided into two groups. The members of one group were massacred and thus became victims of the Holocaust by bullets. Other Jews perished because of forced labor and due to the conditions in the concentration camps in Transnistria, such as Olgopol, Grosolovo, Rîbnița, and others.

Starting in 1942, the Romanian authorities gathered in the Mostovoi concentration camp those Jews from Arad and the Banat area who

¹¹⁵ In Hungarian: Gyorok.

¹¹⁶ In Hungarian: Kiszető-Szıklás.

¹¹⁷ In Hungarian: Lugos.

¹¹⁸ In Hungarian: Fogaras.

¹¹⁹ In Hungarian: Kolozsóbós.

¹²⁰ In Hungarian: Kenderes.

¹²¹ Victor Neumann, "Evreii din Banat și Transilvania de Sud în anii celui de-al doilea război mondial" [The Jews of Banat and Southern Transylvania during the years of the Second World War], <http://adatbank.transindex.ro/inchtm.php?kod=229>; Ana-Maria Caloianu, *Istoria comunității evreiești din Alba Iulia* [The history of the Jewish community of Alba-Iulia] (Bucharest: Hasefer, 2006), 125–48.

¹²² William Marin and Gheorghe I. Oancea, *Mișcarea antifascistă și revoluția populară în Banat* [The anti-fascist movement and the popular revolution in Banat] (Timișoara: Secția de propagandă a Comitetului județean Timiș al P. C. R., 1971), 202–3; for further details, see Victor Neumann, *Istoria evreilor din Banat. O mărturie a multi și interculturalității Europei central-orientale* [The history of the Jews of Banat: A testimony of the multi- and intercultural background of Central and Eastern Europe] (Bucharest: Editura Atlas, 1999); Smaranda Vultur, ed., *Memoria salvată. Evreii din Banat ieri și azi* [Saved memory: The Jews of Banat yesterday and today] (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2002), 297–323.

had converted to Christian religions but not to Romanian Orthodoxy.¹²³ The authorities were convinced that the Jews of Southern Transylvania, speakers of both Hungarian and German language, could easily betray Romanian interests by becoming enemy spies. For that reason, in 1941 the authorities decided to apply a “detailed plan” of deportation of the Jews from Southern Transylvania and Banat to German-occupied Poland. Romanian state leaders Ion and Mihai Antonescu had signed the agreement on the deportation after a succession of discussions with the German authorities, held between November 1941 and the summer of 1942. Preparations were made in Arad, Timișoara,¹²⁴ and Turda,¹²⁵ border towns of Romania at that time, where significant groups of Jews were already concentrated. The representatives of the local Jewish communities were instructed to make up lists of the Jewish population according to their gender, age, and profession. Due to the conjoined efforts of Baron Franz von Neumann of Arad, the main shareholder in Romania’s most important textile manufacturing plant; Alexandru Șafran, Chief Rabbi of Romania; and Metropolitan Bishop Nicolae Bălan, head of the Romanian Orthodox Church of Southern Transylvania, the cancellation of the deportation order was obtained.¹²⁶

¹²³ Letters of László Marmorstein, an inmate of the Mostovoi camp, to his wife living in Arad, October 4, 1942, December 4, 1942, January 10–24, 1943 (copies in the archive of the author); see also: “A) és B) csoport a tiraszpoli szétesztásnál.... Aradiak, akik csodával határos módon menekültek meg Iliescu ezredes transznisztriai tömeghőhér kezéből. A Népbíróság az aradi vizsgálóbíró útján hallgatott ki szemtanúkat—Mostovoi: ahol Köves és Mekler halálukat lelték” [Splitting into Groups A and B in Tiraspol: People of Arad who escaped miraculously from the hands of Colonel Iliescu, the mass executioner of Transnistria: The People’s Tribunal hearings of witnesses by the investigating judge of Arad—Mostovoi: The place where Köves and Mekler perished], *Szabadság* [Arad] 1.142, October 19, 1945, 3; S. K., “A Mosztovoj halálkastély. 250 ezer zsidót öltek meg a németek Mosztovoj vidékén, közöttük huszonöt timișoarai-temesvárit. Timișoarai-temesvári munkás riportja” [Mostovoi death castle: 250,000 Jews were killed by the Germans in the Mostovoi region, including 25 from Timișoara. Report of a worker from Timișoara], *Szabad Szó* [Timișoara/Temesvár], November 16, 1944, 3.

¹²⁴ In Hungarian: Temesvár.

¹²⁵ In Hungarian: Torda.

¹²⁶ Victor Neumann, “Between Hungary and Romania: The Case of the Southern Transylvania’s Jews during the Holocaust,” Explore Publications no. 236, Woodrow Wilson Center, Washington, DC, July 7, 2011, <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/236-between-hungary-and-romania-the-case-the-southern-transylvanias-jews-during-the>.

The Southern Transylvanian Jewish community had other losses when Jews were rounded up on the Romanian side of the Romanian–Hungarian border, in the Sighișoara¹²⁷ area, in May 1944, and transferred to Hungary near Cristuru-Secuiesc, into the custody of Hungarian gendarmes.¹²⁸ They were all taken to the ghetto of Marosvásárhely and ended up in Auschwitz, together with the local Jews.¹²⁹

The number of the Southern Transylvanian Jewish victims also increased following the anti-Jewish actions of the Hungarian army implemented after the September 1944 Hungarian intrusion into Southern Transylvania. In certain regions, during the month-long Hungarian military rule, Jews were forced to wear the yellow star. While in some places—such as Arad, Turda, and other settlements—Hungarians were planning the ghettoization and the deportation of the Jewish communities, in other places they began the immediate destruction of the Jews. In Sărmaș,¹³⁰ for example, under the command of far-right Hungarian officers, during the night of September 16 and 17, 1944, the Hungarian gendarmes gunned down 126 Jewish inhabitants of the village (52 women, 43 children, and 31 men). The victims were buried—some of them alive—in a common grave. During the same period, the Hungarian troops executed 17 Jews in Luduș¹³¹ and 6 in Arad.¹³²

The total number of the Southern Transylvanian victims of the Holocaust cannot be precisely established. However, the numbers known from disparate archival and oral history sources suggest that the number of victims was more than 1,000, but less than 2,000. As a result, one can affirm, that in Southern Transylvania 40,000 Jews survived the Holocaust.

¹²⁷ In Hungarian: Segesvár.

¹²⁸ In Hungarian: Székelykeresztúr.

¹²⁹ Zoltán Tibori Szabó, “Udvarhely vármegye” [Udvarhely County], in *Az észak-erdélyi holokauszt földrajzi enciklopédiája* [The geographical encyclopedia of the Northern Transylvanian Holocaust], ed. Randolph L. Braham and Zoltán Tibori Szabó (Budapest: Park Kiadó; Cluj-Napoca: Koinónia, 2008), 439.

¹³⁰ In Hungarian: Nagysármás.

¹³¹ In Hungarian: Marosludas.

¹³² Randolph L. Braham, “A holokauszt Észak-Erdélyben” [The Holocaust in Northern Transylvania], in *Az észak-erdélyi holokauszt földrajzi enciklopédiája* [The geographical encyclopedia of the Northern Transylvanian Holocaust], ed. Randolph L. Braham and Zoltán Tibori Szabó (Budapest: Park Kiadó; Cluj-Napoca: Koinónia, 2008), 33; Caloianu, *Istoria comunității evreiești*, 150.

Epilogue

By adding up the 35,000 to 40,000 Northern Transylvanian and the 40,000 Southern Transylvanian survivors, it can be stated that 75,000 to 80,000 Transylvanian Jews survived the Shoah. The great majority of them left Transylvania starting at the end of the 1940s and also after 1956. In Transylvania, according to the 2011 census, 1,103 individuals identified themselves as being of Jewish ethnicity, respectively, and 1,178 as being of Israelite religion.¹³³ But many of those individuals moved to Transylvania following the Holocaust, coming especially from other regions of Romania or from the Soviet-occupied regions of Bessarabia and Bukovina, which means that the number of Transylvanian Jewish survivors still living in Transylvania is considerably less.

¹³³ Approximately half of them are living in the former Northern Transylvanian region: 564 declaring themselves of Jewish ethnicity, and 601 of Israelite faith.

Table 1. Ghettos and Concentration Places in Counties of Northern Transylvania

The list contains the days when the different transports crossed the German–Hungarian border at Kassa (Košice), according to the local railway records; exceptions are marked with italics.

County	Name of the town (Hungarian/ Yiddish/Other names)	Location of the ghetto/ concentration place	Covered territory	Period of existence	Total number of inmates (Holocaust literature)	Date of transports to next location/number of persons (Kassa register) ¹	Means of transport/ documented total number of deportees	Destination
Beszterce- Naszód	Beszterce/Bistritz/ Bistrița (Rom.)	Stamboli Farm, near the town— ghetto	Beszterce-Naszód County (local ghettos functioned in Naszód and in Óradna; their inmates ended up in the ghetto of Beszterce)	May 3— June 6, 1944	6,300	June 2/3,106 June 6/2,875	Train (cattle cars)/5,981 (the trains left Beszterce on June 1 and June 4)	Auschwitz-Birkenau
Bihar	Nagyvárad/ Groszarday/Oradea (Rom.)	Jewish quarter of the town— ghetto	Nagyvárad (the biggest provincial ghetto in Hungary)	May 3— June 27, 1944	27,000	May 23/3,023 May 25/3,148 May 28/3,227 May 29/3,166 May 30/3,187 June 1/3,059 June 3/2,972 June 5/2,527	Train (cattle cars)/24,309	Auschwitz-Birkenau
Bihar	Nagyvárad/ Groszarday/Oradea (Rom.)	Mezey lumbervárd— ghetto	Bihar County except Nagyvárad (local ghettos functioned in Erni- hályfalva, Margitta, Nagyszalonita, Szalárd, Székelyhíd, and in three settlements which are today in Hungary: Berettyóújfalú, Derecske, Komádi; their inmates were trans- ferred to the Mezey lumbervárd ghetto)	May 3— June 27, 1944	8,000	May 23/3,110 June 27/2,819 (around 500 from Northern Transylvania)	Train (cattle cars)/3,610	Auschwitz-Birkenau

County	Name of the town (Hungarian/ Yiddish/Other names)	Location of the ghetto/ concentration place	Covered territory	Period of existence	Total number of inmates (Holocaust literature)	Date of transports to next location/number of persons (Kassa register) ¹	Means of transport/ documented total number of deportees	Destination
Csik	Csikszereďa/Sikols- burg/Miercurea Ciuc (Rom.)	Local police HQ— concentration place	Southern part of Csik County; relocated to Sepsiszentgyörgy	May 3–4, 1944, relocated on May 4/ 312	312	–	Trucks, carts, on foot	Concentration place of Sepsiszentgyörgy
Csik	Gyergyószent- miklós/Niklas- markt/Gheorgheni (Rom.)	Local Elementary School— concentration place	Northern part of Csik County; relocated to Szászrégen	May 3–11, 1944, relocated on May 11/ 986	986	–	Train (cattle cars)	Ghetto of Szászrégen
Háromszék	Sepsiszentgyörgy/ Gergen/Sfântu- Gheorghe (Rom.)	Economic High School (under construction) on Csiki Street— concentration place	Háromszék County; relocated to Szászrégen	May 3–10, 1944, relocated on May 10/ 900	900–950	–	Train (cattle cars)	Ghetto of Szászrégen
Kolozs	Bánffyhyunyad/ Hunyadi/Huedin (Rom.)	Courtyard of the local orthodox synagogue— concentration place	Bánffyhyunyad and surroundings	May 3–5, 1944/ 950	950	–	Trucks, carts	Ghetto of Kolozsvár

County	Name of the town (Hungarian/ Yiddish/Other names)	Location of the ghetto/ concentration place	Covered territory	Period of existence	Total number of inmates (Holocaust literature)	Date of transports to next location/number of persons (Kassa register) ¹	Means of transport/ documented total number of deportees	Destination
Kolozs	Kolozsvár/Klozen- burg/Cluj-Napoca (Rom.)	Iris quarter brickyard— ghetto	Kolozs County, people concen- trated in the ghetto of Szamosújvár (Szolnok-Doboka County)	May 3— June 9, 1944	> 18,000	May 25/3,130 May 29/3,417 May 31/3,270 June 2/3,100 June 8/1,784 June 9/1,447	Train (cattle cars)/16,148	Auschwitz-Birkenau
Maros- Torda	Marosvásárhely/ Vasharhey/Iargu- Mureș (Rom.)	Brickyard on Koronkai street— ghetto	Marosvásárhely, Western part of Maros-Torda County, and Udvarhely County	May 3—May 29, 1944	6,500	May 27/3,183 May 30/3,203	Train (cattle cars)/6,386	Auschwitz-Birkenau
Maros- Torda	Marosvásárhely/ Vasharhey/Iargu- Mureș (Rom.)	Cattle market on Szentgyörgyi Street—ghetto	Marosvásárhely (alleviating overcrowding in Koronkai Street brickyard ghetto)	May 10—June 7, 1944	1,300	June 8/1,163	Train (cattle cars)/1,163	Auschwitz-Birkenau
Maros- Torda	Szászrégen/Regen/ Reghin (Rom.)	Local brickyard— ghetto	Eastern part of Maros-Torda County, Csik County, and Háromszék County	May 3— June 4, 1944	4,000	June 4/3,149 <i>June 10?</i>	Train (cattle cars)/3,149	Auschwitz-Birkenau
Máramo- ros	Aknaszlátina/ Slafina/Solotvyno (Ukr.), Ocna Slatina (Rom.)	Downtown area of the city—ghetto	Aknaszlátina, Alsóapcsa, Alsóórna, Felsőórna, Hosszúmező, Kabolapa- tak, Középpapsa, Remetefálva, Rónaszék, Szarvaszó, Tiszaféregy- ház, Tiszakarácsonyfálva, Tiszave- resmart	April 17— May 23	5,000	<i>May 20?</i> May 25/3,317	Train (cattle cars)/3,317	Auschwitz-Birkenau

County	Name of the town (Hungarian/ Yiddish/Other names)	Location of the ghetto/ concentration place	Covered territory	Period of existence	Total number of inmates (Holocaust literature)	Date of transports to next location/number of persons (Kassa register) ¹	Means of transport/ documented total number of deportees	Destination
Máramaros	Bárdfalva/Berbesh/ Berbești (Rom.)	Local synagogue and Talmud-Tora building	Barcănalva, Bréb, Budfalva, Falusugatag, Farkasrév, Fejérfalva, Felsőkalinafalva, Hernécs, Hotinka, Krásfalva, Márgyalafalva, Mikolapatak, Nánfalva, Szerfalva, Váncfalva	April 15– May 17, 1944/3,000	3,000	–	On foot	Ghetto of Máramarossziget (deported to Auschwitz on May 18, 1944)
Máramaros	Dragomér- falva/Dragmersh/ Dragomirești (Rom.)	Central area of the village—ghetto	Batiza, Felsőszeliste, Glód, Iza- konyha, Izaszacsal, Jód, Kisbocskó, Rozália, Sajó, Sajómező, Szurdok	April 15– May 19, 1944/2,000	2,000	–	Carts, on foot	Ghetto of Felsővisó (deported to Auschwitz on May 19, 1944)
Máramaros	Felsővisó/Ober- Vișho/Vîșeu de sus (Rom.)	Jewish quarter of the village— ghetto	Alsóvisó, Borsá, Havaskő, Leordina, Majszin, Petrova, Petrovabisztra, Szelistye, Visóoroszi, Visóvágy	April 16– May 25, 1944	12,000	May 19/3,032 May 21/3,013 May 23/3,023 May 25/3,006	Train (cattle cars)/12,074	Auschwitz-Birkenau
Máramaros	Máramarossziget/ Sighet, Sigét/ Sighetu Marmatîiei (Rom.)	Jewish quarter of the city—ghetto	Máramarossziget	April 20– May 22, 1944	10,000	May 18/3,248 May 20/3,104 May 22/3,490	Train (cattle cars)/9,842	Auschwitz-Birkenau
Máramaros	Máramarossziget/ Sighet, Sigét/ Sighetu Marmatîiei (Rom.)	Poor Jewish quarter of the city—ghetto	Aknaugatag, Desze, Disznópataka	April 20– May 16, 1944	3,000	May 16/3,007	Train (cattle cars)/3,007	Auschwitz-Birkenau

County	Name of the town (Hungarian/ Yiddish/Other names)	Location of the ghetto/ concentration place	Covered territory	Period of existence	Total number of inmates (Holocaust literature)	Date of transports to next location/number of persons (Kassa register) ¹	Means of transport/ documented total number of deportees	Destination
Máramaros	Técső/Tëichiv/Teceu (Rom.), Tyacsiw (Ukr.)	Jewish quarter of the city—ghetto	Dombó, Pálosremete, Szaplonca, Széleslonka, Vajnágy, Visk	April 16— May 28, 1944	10,000	April 27? April 29?–3000? May 17? May 22 (24?)/? May 26? May 28/2,208	Train (cattle cars)/2,208	Auschwitz-Birkenau
Szatmár	Nagybánya/Banya/ Baia Mare (Rom.)	Bernáth Foundry	Nagybánya	May 3— June 5, 1944	3,500	May 31/3,073	Train (cattle cars)/3,073	Auschwitz-Birkenau
Szatmár	Nagybánya/Banya/ Baia Mare (Rom.)	Molcsány farm in Borpatak	Nagysomkúti, Kápolnokmonostori, and Felsőbányai districts	May 3— June 5, 1944	2,000	June 5/2,844	Train (cattle cars)/2,844	Auschwitz-Birkenau
Szatmár	Nagykároly/Kharoy/ Carei (Rom.)	Four streets in the Jewish quarter of the town and the local paper mill	Nagykároly and surroundings	May 3—13, 1944	2,000	—	Train (cattle cars)	Ghetto of Szat- márnémeti
Szatmár	Szatmárnémeti/ Sakhmeh, Sath- mehr/Satu Mare (Rom.)	Four streets in the Jewish quarter of the town	Szatmár County	May 3— June 1, 1944	18,800	May 19/3,006 May 22/3,300 May 26/3,336 May 29/3,306 May 30/3,300 June 1/2,615	Train (cattle cars)/18,863	Auschwitz-Birkenau

County	Name of the town (Hungarian/ Yiddish/Other names)	Location of the ghetto/ concentration place	Covered territory	Period of existence	Total number of inmates (Holocaust literature)	Date of transports to next location/number of persons (Kassa register) ¹	Means of transport/ documented total number of deportees	Destination
Szilágy	Szilágyosomlyó/ Shomlen/Şimleu Silvaniei (Rom.)	Weinberger Distillery	Szilágyosomlyó	May 3–4, 1944	2,000	–	On foot	Ghetto of Som- lyócsehi
Szilágy	Somlyócsehi/So- myo/Cehei (Rom.)	Somlyócsehi brickyard	Szilágy County	May 4– June 6, 1944	8,500	May 31/3,106 June 3/3,161 June 6/1,584	Train (cattle cars)/7,851	Auschwitz-Birkenau
Szolnok- Doboka	Dés/Deesh/Dej (Rom.)	Bungur forest	Dés, respectively the northern part of Szolnok-Doboka County (Dési, Bethleni, Kékesi, Magyarláposi, and Nagyilondai districts)	May 3– June 8, 1944	7,800	May 28/3,150 June 6/3,160 June 8/1,364	Train (cattle cars)/7,674	Auschwitz-Birkenau
Szolnok- Doboka	Szamosújvár/ Nayshloss/Gherla (Rom.)	Local brickyard	Szamosújvár and Southern part of Szolnok-Doboka County	May 3–18, 1944	1,600	–	Train	Iris quarter brickyard ghetto of Kolozsvár
Udvarhely	Bőzőújfalú/Bezed/ Bezidu Nou (Rom.)	Courtyard of the Lovász cottage	Bőzöd, Bőzőújfalú, Kőröspatak	May 3–4, 1944	94	–	Carts	Koronkai Street brickyard ghetto of Marosvásárhely (de- ported to Auschwitz on May 25; Kassa: May 27)

County	Name of the town (Hungarian/ Yiddish/Other names)	Location of the ghetto/ concentration place	Covered territory	Period of existence	Total number of inmates (Holocaust literature)	Date of transports to next location/number of persons (Kassa register) ¹	Means of transport/ documented total number of deportees	Destination
Udvarhely	Parajd/Parajd/Praid (Rom.)	Local school	Parajd and surroundings	May 3–4, 1944	92	–	Train	Koronkai Street brickyard ghetto of Marosvásárhely (de- ported to Auschwitz on May 25; Kassa: May 27)
Udvarhely	Székelyudvarhely/ Oderheiu/Odorheiu Secuiesc (Rom.)	Local training school	Székelyudvarhely and surroundings	May 3–5, 1944	276	–	Trucks	Koronkai Street brickyard ghetto of Marosvásárhely (de- ported to Auschwitz on May 25; Kassa: May 27)
Udvarhely	Székelykeresztúr/ Kreutz/Cristuru Secuiesc (Rom.)	Local synagogue on Csekefalvi Street	Székelykeresztúr and surroundings	May 3–May 7, 1944	160	–	Carts, on foot	Koronkai Street brickyard ghetto of Marosvásárhely
Ugocsa	Nagyszőlős/Selish/ Vinohrayiv (Ukr.), Seleuşu Mare (Rom.)	Jewish quarter of the city (around the synagogue)— ghetto	Ugocsa County; also: Alsóveresmart, Felsőveresmart, Kistama, Rakasz, Rákospatak, Sósfa, Tiszakirva, Veréce (Máramaros)	April 16–June 2, 1944	12,000 (near 2,500 from Northern Transylvania)	May 20/3,458 May 27/3,415 June 3/2,967	Train (cattle cars)/9,840 (approx. 2,500 from Northern Transylvania)	Auschwitz-Birkenau
Total number of Northern Transylvanian individuals:							133,999	

The Sociology of Survival: The Presence of the Budapest Jewish Population Groups of 1941 in the 1945 Budapest Population

Péter Tibor Nagy

Concerning the sociological aspects of the Hungarian Holocaust, two competing hypotheses have arisen in the social discourse.¹ The two hypotheses do not merely reflect the differing views of historical experts; they also constitute—like many aspects of the Holocaust narrative—alternative ways for society to face up to, or come to terms with, the Holocaust. These alternatives relate in part to whether the Holocaust should be viewed as a “historical” or “extrahistorical” event, an issue of both anthropological and philosophical importance.

According to the first hypotheses, there is nothing in a sociological sense to say about those who fell victim to the Holocaust. In this narrative, the anti-Jewish laws designated the individuals who were to be denied their rights and then removed them from society, doing so on the basis of two socially relevant pieces of information—their religion and the religion of their grandparents. Then, as part of the “final solution,” the Hungarian and German governments murdered the people

¹ Cf. Ferenc Erős, *Trauma és történelem* [Trauma and history] (Budapest: Józseveg műhely, 2007); Victor Karady, *Túlélők és újrakezdők* [Survivors and new beginners] (Budapest: Múlt és Jövő, 2002); László Karsai, *Holokausz* [Holocaust] (Budapest: Pannonica, 2001); Géza Komoróczy, *Holocaust* (Budapest: Osiris kiadó, 2000); András Kovács, “A zsidókérdés a mai magyar társadalomban” [The Jewish Question in contemporary Hungarian society,” in *Zsidóság az 1945 utáni Magyarországon* [Jewry in post-1945 Hungary] (Paris: Magyar Füzetek, 1984), 3–35; Péter Várdy, *Tilalomfák ellenében* [In spite of the prohibition posts], ed. Tamás Majsai (Budapest: WJLF, 2010).

who had been thus selected. For many commentators, the uniqueness of the Holocaust lies in the fact that, unlike other historical persecutions and mass murders, the Holocaust machinery made no distinction between men and women, adults and children, the educated and uneducated, rich and poor. Instances of people being rescued or successfully fleeing were limited to a small number of individuals and were random in a historical sense.

According to the second hypothesis, while the *intent* to murder may have been nondifferentiating, the *success rate* of the mass murder exhibits a systematic (i.e., nonrandom) pattern in a sociological sense. Individual factors, such as status within Jewish society and the amount of solidarity received from members of non-Jewish society, helped certain individuals or families to escape. Thus, different groups in Jewish society were affected by the Holocaust to varying degrees. Accordingly, the probability of an individual being able to survive the Holocaust was not random. This latter narrative places the Holocaust firmly within history (thus also making it a part of Hungarian history). Rather than portray—or even excuse—the events as a “natural disaster” or even “supernatural disaster,” it places the emphasis on the causal chain, whereby the murderous destruction is exposed as the outcome of the actions, interests, and (im)moral decisions of real people, who were fellow citizens, existing in history both before and after the Holocaust. That is to say, in a didactic sense, we might even claim that the events could have taken a different course: a greater number of people might have become involved in rescuing the Jews, the number and range of people rescued might have been greater, and so forth.

Holocaust memory amply supports both hypotheses: on the one hand, many people fell victim who would have been able to flee had there been any kind of social rationale or selection criteria. On the other hand, the debates on the Jewish councils and the discourse surrounding the composition and selection of the Kastner group of refugees, have drawn attention to the systematic (nonrandom) pattern of the rescue actions and survival rates.

Efforts to compare and contrast the pre- and post-Holocaust Hungarian Jewish populations—first and foremost the work of Victor Karady—have necessarily been subject to the statistical limits of the sources. The censuses of 1930 and 1941 present, in great detail, the social demographics of adherents to Judaism, but they provide only the most basic data on the other people who were classed as Jews under Hungary’s anti-Jewish laws. Meanwhile the only salient data from the 1949 census relates

to the regional distribution of the Jewish population. While such census data is extremely significant, for methodological reasons it tells us nothing about the social specifics of the destruction wrought by the Holocaust. As a result, five factors become inextricably mixed:

1. The different course and destruction level of the Holocaust in terms of *event history* within and outside Budapest
2. The socially systematic (nonrandom) pattern of those Jews who were residing outside Budapest at the time of the 1941 census but who were Budapest residents in 1944 when the Holocaust struck
3. The systematic (nonrandom) pattern according to which Jews originally from outside Budapest survived the Budapest ghetto, the death marches and the concentration camps to return to their native cities, or to remain in Budapest, or to leave the country
4. The systematic (nonrandom) pattern according to which survivors switched occupations between 1945 and 1949, exploiting the opportunities that arose from the abolition of formal discrimination or from the emigration in 1945 and 1948 of non-Jewish government officials and state security personnel
5. The systematic (nonrandom) pattern whereby, at the time of the 1949 census, some people chose to make use of the enhanced opportunities for declaring no religious affiliation, which had not really been an option in 1930 or in 1941

It is universally acknowledged that it is not possible to solve an equation of five variables by means of a single equation—between the two sets of data comprising the aggregated data for the Jewish population in 1941 and 1949. Data published independently of the two censuses have not been filtered in such a way that they might assist us in distinguishing between the various factors in an accurate manner.² Source research of a sufficiently multidimensional nature is *only* possible if we are able to define the selected group of *individuals* prior to the Holocaust and then relocate these same individuals in the post-Holocaust setting (in 1945).

² Tamás Stark, *Zsidók a vészkorszakban és a felszabadulás után* [Jews in the Shoah and post-Liberation] (Budapest, MTA Történettudományi intézete, 1995), 41–75; World Jewish Congress, *Bulletin* 1 (February 15, 1947) (*Zsidó Világkonresszus Magyarországi Tagozata Statisztikai Osztályának Közleményei* [Publications of the Statistical Section of the Hungarian Branch of the World Jewish Congress]), 4–5; Karady, *Túlélők és újrakezdők*, 68–74.

That is to say, rather than examine aggregate statistical figures, we need to look at a single element (our ability to locate a person) in a prosopographical study. My research, conducted in cooperation with Victor Karady over the past twenty years, has established several name databases, which can now be used to examine the systematic (nonrandom) character of Holocaust survival.

While still enormous in size, the database with the narrowest range relates to the elite Jewish population (individuals with public reputations). For individuals featuring in the *Hungarian Biographical Encyclopedia* (*Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon*) or the *Great Hungarian Encyclopedia* (*Magyar Nagylexikon*) who were born before 1910 and who were still alive in 1941, we can determine with statistically sufficient accuracy those who were affected by the provisions of the anti-Jewish laws. When determining this group of individuals, we can also turn to other databanks containing relevant information, including the 1929 *Hungarian Jewish Encyclopedia* (*Magyar Zsidó Lexikon*), interwar Jewish magazines (classified as Jewish on the basis of the self-identification of the editorial boards), individuals listed as authors, translators or illustrators in certain book series, intellectuals who were denied membership of professional associations in consequence of the anti-Jewish laws, and individuals who were identified as Jews in the Kolosváry-Borcsa bibliography of 1944 in anticipation of the burning of books in Hungary. Adherents to Judaism can also be identified on the basis of lists drawn up at grammar schools or on registration at university; admittedly, this does not cover the entire Jewish population.

If in a statistical sense—that is, neither to the full extent nor with complete certainty—we can identify those individuals featured in the encyclopedias who in effect received death sentences from the Hungarian and German states, then, based on the disparities between those alive in 1945 and those murdered at some point between 1941 and 1945, we can determine the probability of survival for specific social groups. Using the data in the biographical encyclopedia, we can consider several factors: occupation, age, a foreign or Hungarian surname, place of birth—all of which are known in almost all the cases. We also have access to generally relevant data which can be coded into statistical categories, for positions held in the 1930s and 1940s, the place of employment, academic career, and the objective extent of domestic or foreign recognition. All these factors may have influenced the probability of survival.

Another type of source—providing information only on adherents to Judaism—comprises the registration documentation for secondary school

and university. Despite the limited educational opportunities, we find a number of Jewish individuals among secondary school and university students in the period 1941–44. The registration documents for such students contain information on gender, names, and the place of education. Often, the occupations of parents and their place of birth and residence are also available. Some of these school and university students continued their studies after 1945. While acknowledging that not all the individuals absent from the post-1945 registration data were dead, we may still identify systematic (nonrandom) statistical differences in the social backgrounds and group characteristics of those whom we were able to locate and those who were lost.

The third databank is based on the 1941 and 1945 surveys of Budapest dwellings and their inhabitants (the Budapest household surveys) and on a comparison between the two sets of data. These two databases offer information on all social groups in Budapest. In theory, we can seek to locate the individuals residing in Budapest in the 1941 and 1945 surveys. Of course, this is merely a theoretical possibility, because our ability (or inability) to locate a person in 1945 will depend on additional factors other than the Holocaust—natural death or outward migration from Budapest. Further, many Jewish men who served in the labor battalions were subsequently held as prisoners of war; they will evidently account for some of the people missing in 1945.

Despite these drawbacks, this is the only source providing mass data (i.e., data that is not based on a person's educational level and that is representative of contemporary Jewish society) which can therefore be used to identify individuals in a systematic manner in the pre- and post-Holocaust periods. This exceptional feature explains why, in this chapter, I shall focus on these two sets of data.

Evidently, the theoretical opportunity could only be realized in the event of a prior investment of tens of thousands of euros: a survey of all the relevant documents in several hundred boxes at the Budapest Archives would require this amount of financial support. In the 2000s, the resources at our disposal enabled us to complete a 5-percent sample. The sample was produced—the technical details of the procedure will have significance later on—by first determining the number of dwelling sheets in certain archive boxes and then proceeding from the dwelling at the very back of the box in a reverse fashion, covering the data of 5 percent of the dwelling sheets in the various boxes. Having determined the street name and number found on the last dwelling sheet in a given box, we then proceeded further in a reverse fashion, so that the dwellings in the given

house were recorded in full. This supplementary rule slightly increased the size of the sample in inner-city districts where houses (buildings) tended to include a large number of dwelling units, and it slightly decreased the size of the sample in outlying districts where houses (buildings) tended to comprise a smaller number of dwelling units. We accepted this distortion, however, because it greatly increased the number of houses (buildings) that we could analyze in full.

The samples taken from the 1941 and 1945 surveys are representative when viewed in separation, but since we are talking about 5-percent samples, the sample overlap would in theory be very small, covering no more than 0.25% of the population. This rate of coverage—even though we are talking about the country's largest Jewish community—would clearly be insufficient for an analysis of the probability of survival based on occupation.

In fact, however, the situation is a lot better than this. The dwelling sheets were not placed in the various boxes in a manner that would have made optimal use of the space. Instead, regardless of how much space was left in a box, the archivists closed boxes, once they had placed in the box the last dwelling sheet for the last house (building) in a given enumeration district. They then opened a new box for houses and dwellings in the next enumeration district. The boundaries of the enumeration districts were the same in both 1941 and 1945, and it seems that the order of houses within the enumeration districts was also fixed.

Thus, in addition to the fact that the samples for 1941 and for 1945 are representative in separation, the manner in which boxes were opened and closed and the aforementioned sampling method indicate that we have many houses (buildings) that are included in both samples.

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In 1941, out of the 2,956 houses (buildings) in the sample, we found Jewish inhabitants in 1,024 houses. (Jews formed a majority of residents in 212 houses, but there were only 26 houses—mostly smaller detached houses—inhabited exclusively by Jews.) We may conclude therefore that in 1941 the Jewish and non-Jewish populations of Budapest were very mixed, as a result of social-historical and housing market processes. This is true despite the fact that Budapest had certain districts with an under- or over-representation of Jews.

Table 1. Christians and Jews in the Sample

	Christians	Adherents to Judaism	Nonadherents to Judaism classed as Jews under anti-Jewish law	Total
Males	28,574	6184	702	35,460
Females	35,243	6980	739	42,962
Total	68,062	13,245	1,447	82,754

The share of adherents to Judaism in our sample is 16.0%, compared with 15.8% in the census. As we anticipated, therefore, our random sampling method proved very effective. In contrast, the percentage of nonadherents to Judaism classed as Jews under Hungarian law is 1.7% in our sample, whereas it was 3.3% in the census. This disparity is rather large. Evidently, this indicates that in the course of the Budapest household surveys there were certain opportunities for individuals classed as Jews under Hungarian law to conceal their “Jewishness”—but we are unable to reconstrue the precise circumstances under which this could happen. (Arguably, this phenomenon may reflect differences in the respective control mechanisms employed by the national office of statistics, which conducted the censuses, and by the Budapest municipal authorities, which oversaw the household surveys. Such disparities may, in turn, reflect attitudinal differences between the two institutions.) Concealment of identity does not distort the gender ratio: in our sample, males account for 48.3% of nonadherents to Judaism classed as Jews under Hungarian law, and this is almost equal to the corresponding male ratio of 48.5% in the census. Nor do we find much of a distortion in terms of the religious affiliation of nonadherents to Judaism classed as Jews: the only significant underrepresentation in the sample appears to be Calvinists classed as Jews.

Table 2. The Religious Affiliation of Nonadherents to Judaism Classed as Jews

	In the census	In the household survey	In the sample
Roman Catholic	13,966	63.1	64.5
Greek Catholic	127	0.6	1.0
Calvinist (Reformed)	4,232	19.1	16.5
Lutheran	3,222	14.6	15.0
Greek Orthodox	137	0.6	0.3
Unitarian	299	1.4	2.0
Unknown	139	0.6	0.8
	22,122	100	100

Karady's hypothesis that the survival chances of Christians classed as Jews were likely to have been greater than the survival chances of Jews who were adherents to Judaism—as the former were more likely to have Christian relatives and friends who were willing to offer assistance—cannot really be tested on the basis of our sample, for we may rightly assume that the small percentage of such individuals (1.6%) who were able to conceal their Jewishness at the time of the household survey were also the ones who—according to this rationale—would later have a greater chance of survival.

Indirectly, however, we are able to prove that Christian ties did improve the chances of survival. We found that 36.8% of Jews with spouses who were *not* classed as Jews were still living in the same dwellings in 1945 as in 1941, whereas the corresponding percentage for Jews with Jewish spouses was only 19.7%. Having a Christian spouse increased an individual's chances of survival by a factor of 1.9. (The percentage ratios are always problematic, for a 90% figure can hardly be viewed in terms of a multiple factor of 80%. In this chapter, however, I employ such methods because we are talking exclusively of probability groups within a range of 15% to 42%.)

In terms of occupation, we found that individuals with a higher level of education or in "higher status" occupations had better chances of survival. We proved this within the various categories by presenting comparable aggregate figures. Although the aggregates differ in size and the boundaries between the categories are disputable (as with all categorizations), we shall see in the following that there is always a link (a relationship) when we compare and contrast the fate and chances of individuals in "higher status" and "lower status" occupations.

In 1945 we find 24.1% of the skilled workers who had been recorded as Jews in 1941, but only 15.7% of the unskilled workers. Being a skilled worker seems, therefore, to have increased the chances of survival in the lower half of Jewish society in Budapest by a factor of 1.5. The traditionally more organized nature of skilled workers (trade unions and guilds) evidently explains in part this disparity (alongside other explanatory factors, such as higher levels of education and income and stronger ties to middle-class society). In addition, the modest rescue capacities of the political left wing were more likely to have targeted skilled workers.

It is not easy to divide intellectuals into groups. In 1945 we find 21.4% of the public sector intellectuals (teachers, museum employees, etc.) who had been recorded as Jews in 1941, but only 15.8% of the private sector intellectuals (journalists, artists, etc.). Of course, it is likely that by 1944—when the probability of being murdered dramatically increased—most of

the intellectuals who had been employed in the public sector in 1941 were no longer in their former jobs. This circumstance, however, makes their enhanced chances of survival—relative to the chances of their fellows in the private sector—even more noteworthy. This is because if an individual lost his or her job at some time between 1941 and 1944, then he or she was more likely to have moved away from the rented dwelling (the rent of which had previously been covered by the officially guaranteed housing supplement for public employees), and so we are even less likely to find the individual in the same dwelling in 1945. Thus, the above piece of data, which shows that the survival chances of public sector intellectuals were greater than the survival chances of private sector intellectuals by a factor of 1.4, should be regarded as an underestimate.

Our assumption that many teachers and cultural employees lost their jobs between 1941 and 1945 must apply to an even greater extent to senior public officials, for the attraction of senior posts was clearly greater in the eyes of those who wished to benefit from the “changing of the guard.” That is to say, we may assume that even greater efforts were made to remove Jews from such positions. Even so, in 1945 we find 31.3% of the leader elite of public officials who had been classed as Jews in 1941. This figure seems particularly high when compared with the corresponding figure—16.7%—for public employees of lower positions. Being in a senior position increased an individual’s chances of survival by a factor of 1.9. Evidently, by the summer/autumn of 1944, none of the senior public officials were still in their posts. Nonetheless, they had evidently retained their contacts in non-Jewish society and they also enjoyed greater prestige within ghetto society.

The disparity is much smaller in the private sector, but the trend is the same. In 1945 we find 27.8% of the senior private sector employees who had been classed as Jews in 1941. This compares with a figure of 22.7% for the junior private sector employees. Here, the disparity factor is only 1.2. Grouping the occupations together, we find that the chances of survival in comparable occupational categories were always greater for those in more senior positions and for those working in the public sector of the economy. Despite a worsening of employment prospects due to the anti-Jewish laws, we may hypothesize that social ties—particularly the strength of relations with non-antisemitic sections of non-Jewish society—that could more easily be established (and maintained) by individuals in senior positions and/or working in the public sector than by individuals in junior positions and/or working in the private sector, exerted a direct or indirect effect on the probability of survival.

Irrespective of occupational position, financial wealth may be interpreted as another independent factor increasing the chances of survival. Although wealth may provoke envy and murderous intent as well as increase the risks of concealing Jewish identity (and thus also the risks of death), nevertheless it seems that wealth acted to raise the chances of survival: there was a greater chance of securing lifesaving medicines and food items on the black market, and there was more money to spend on obtaining false papers or on bribing police personnel or Arrow Cross members. The increased survival chances of individuals in senior occupational positions can be interpreted from this angle, too. Still, the effect of financial wealth is more clearly shown in the fact that in 1945 we find 42.0% of the “great” industrialists and wholesalers who had been classed as Jews in 1941, while the corresponding figure for “small” industrialists and wholesalers is only 23.8%. Here, the disparity factor is 1.8 to the advantage of the wealthier group.

Another of our suppositions was that the special skills and knowledge required for life in the ghetto improved an individual’s chances of survival, perhaps even superseding the hierarchy seen in ordinary life. This supposition turned out to be only partially true. Skilled workers and “small” industrialists were evidently less educated, but they had more practical knowledge and were apparently better able to deal with the physical challenges of ghetto life than were intellectuals in the free professions or junior public or private employees.

Surprisingly, however—and I have not yet found an explanation for this—at the other end of the social spectrum, “practical usefulness” does not seem to have provided an advantage: in 1945 we find 21.4% of the medical doctors who had been classed as Jews in 1941, whereas the corresponding figure for lawyers is 29.6%. The higher figure for the latter group appears to contradict the “usefulness theory.” A hypothetical albeit insufficient explanation is that the main health-care problem in the ghetto was the absence of medicines and medical equipment rather than a lack of qualified medical staff. If this was the case, then the type of knowledge capital held by lawyers—the ability to negotiate with the authorities and familiarity with police procedures—counterbalanced the fact that mere legal knowledge must have been more difficult to convert into food (food required for one’s survival) than medical knowledge. A role may also have been played—as Victor Karady pointed out to me, after he kindly read through my draft notes—by the fact that far-right supporters accounted for a particularly high share of the membership of the professional associations for doctors and medical students—36% of non-Jewish doctors in

Budapest. Accordingly, we may assume that only a relatively small number of doctors would have been prepared to risk their own jobs in order to help their Jewish colleagues. Indeed, it seems many of them welcomed—or actively promoted—the removal of “the competition.”

In summary, of the alternatives formulated at the beginning of this chapter, the second hypothesis has proved correct: the probability of survival was influenced not only by the circumstances that are known to us from event history and were foreseeable in an anthropological sense—residence in Budapest or outside Budapest, age, etc.—but also by the position of an individual within Jewish society in Budapest and by his or her distance from non-Jewish society, given that the latter group clearly had more opportunities for rescuing Jews. This finding serves to confirm—to a limited extent—the view that the Holocaust was not “extrahistorical.” Rather, it happened within history. In other words, we should view it as an event embedded in Hungarian social history.

Across the Iron Curtain—Hungarian Jewish Refugees in Austria, 1945–49: The Letters to Enns

Rebekah Klein-Pejšová

The postal service in postwar Hungary began operating again in August 1946. Until then, the means by which Jews in Hungary desperately sought to reach their relatives and friends abroad centered on the Budapest branch office of HICEM, a Hebrew sheltering and migrant aid society, located in the city's central fifth district, at 7 Dorottya Street.¹ The Budapest HICEM office also served as the communication hub for Hungarian Jews abroad seeking relatives in Hungary. In the first half of 1946 alone, the office handled 11,000 such inquiries from abroad, with a reported 70 percent success rate. While that rate was certainly encouraging, there was also a great deal of room for anxiety, frustration, and grief. Floods of inquiries passed through the HICEM: 23,000 to known addresses of relatives abroad, 7,000 messages to people in Hungary, and 1,500 letters to HICEM offices elsewhere related to these inquiries and messages. The office published the names of people sought by relatives

I acknowledge with gratitude the aid of Maria Rethelyi with translations from the Hungarian.

¹ HICEM is an acronym resulting from the merger of HIAS (Hebrew Immigration Aid Society), ICA (Jewish Colonization Association), and Emigdirect (United Jewish Emigration Committee). YIVO, RG 245.5 (MKK 19) HIAS/HICEM France IV, folder 228, "Report on Our Activity," August 13, 1946. The Budapest office most frequently contacted the main European office in Paris, and the head office in New York.

and friends in the only postwar Hungarian Jewish newspaper, *Új Élet* (New life).

Across the border, in Austria's American occupation zone,² unofficial mail services for Jewish Displaced Persons (DPs) had been in operation since shortly after the end of the war, organized by the American Jewish army chaplain Rabbi Eli Bohnen. He described the area where the Jewish DPs were accommodated as "muddy, with dilapidated camps in leaky buildings and with a totally insufficient food supply."³ The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC, or Joint) worked energetically with the United States Army to improve Jewish DP conditions, including the organization of a private mail and parcels service. Postal services were handled by James Rice who had been appointed by the Joint to supervise its program for resettling Jewish refugees in Italy, France, Switzerland, and Austria.⁴

This essay begins examination of the experience of Hungarian Jewish refugees in the Displaced Person camps and centers in Austria as the border between Hungary and Austria gradually closed. It does so through the prism of contact, drawing in particular on a forgotten cache of undelivered mail addressed to Hungarian Jewish refugees who sojourned at the transient DP camp at Enns, Green Shelter, number 106, in Upper Austria in 1946 and 1947 from their relatives and friends in Hungary. The camp at Enns is the fixed point in this story of Hungarian Jews' attempts to map and travel paths of adaptation to their shattered world. Contact with relatives, friends, and international Jewish organizations such as the Joint was crucial for understanding the parameters of this postwar world, pondering the constellation of available options, and shaping strategies beyond survival in the consolidating postwar system for Jews in Hungary and abroad.

Population displacement in the early postwar period—in the few short chaotic years between the end of the Second World War and the consoli-

² In the latter part of 1945, the US Zone of Austria was controlled by two US Army divisions. The 42nd Infantry Division, which had liberated Dachau, was located in Land Salzburg under Major General Harry J. Collins. The 65th Infantry Division, replaced there by the 26th Infantry Division, in Upper Austria, was headquartered at Linz, where Major General Stanley E. Rinehart was military governor.

³ Yehuda Bauer, *Out of the Ashes: The Impact of American Jews on Post-Holocaust European Jewry* (Oxford/New York: Pergamon Press, 1989), 67.

⁴ Bauer, *Out of the Ashes*, 68.

dation of Stalinist dictatorship in a newly defined Eastern Europe—is an important area of new historical research. It reveals afresh the extent of the wartime devastation, and the process of postwar European reconstruction. Through it we face the reality of postwar Jewish life. For Jewish existence in Eastern and Central Europe did not end after the war, but was tragically and radically transformed. Beyond the large-scale devastation of the Holocaust, this transformation included the global dispersal of the surviving Jewish population. Postwar Jewish history moves from displacement to dispersion. This dispersion defines the dimensions of the postwar Jewish experience, from relations with the relatives and friends in the new diaspora, to relations with the state and the surrounding society. The efforts of Jews on both sides of the Iron Curtain to remain in contact fueled suspicions against the Jewish population in the Stalinist Eastern Bloc states as an a priori disloyal element. The very fact of global dispersal beyond those tightly controlled borders informed how the state and society viewed the Jews and Jewish issues within them.

Much of the recent scholarship on population displacement deals with international politics in the period covered by the mandates of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, or UNRRA (1944–47), and its successor, the International Refugee Organization, or IRO (1947–52), which was established when it became clear that the refugee problem would not disappear through repatriation. In September 1945, approximately 1 to 1.2 million people remained displaced in Europe, following the largely successful efforts by United States military authorities and UNRRA to repatriate the 11 million displaced at the end of the war. They were located primarily in the occupation zones of Germany. The number of displaced persons dramatically increased with the arrival of the approximately 12 million ethnic Germans who fled or were expelled from Eastern Europe. They were followed by opponents of the nascent socialist Eastern European regimes; and then by Polish, Hungarian, Romanian, Czech, and Slovak Jews who did not want to return home. With a warrant for DP care and maintenance, the IRO was born from the shift in goals from repatriation to resettlement. The shift occurred with UNRRA's recognition that many DPs could not indeed safely return home, and should not be forced to do so. As Cold War tensions heightened, so too did the IRO become a flashpoint in East–West relations. The Soviet Union refused to participate in IRO's efforts to arrange DP resettlement overseas. The IRO sought routes of resettlement through countries willing to receive the refugees, creating migra-

tion and labor programs attuned to the emerging postwar geopolitical system.⁵

At first, United States military authorities did not recognize Jews as a distinct group to be handled separately, and Jewish DPs were heedlessly housed together in poor conditions under military guard with peoples who had persecuted them during the war. This changed after Earl G. Harrison's condemnatory report to President Truman concerning the mistreatment and poor care of nonrepatriable Jews.⁶ Truman had asked Harrison, the newly appointed dean of the University of Pennsylvania Law School and President Roosevelt's former commissioner of immigration and naturalization, to lead an official mission to investigate conditions in the DP camps, with special attention to prevailing conditions among stateless and nonrepatriable Jewish refugees. Harrison turned in his report to Truman at the end of August 1945 when the world's attention was fixed on the commencing Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal. "As matters now stand," he wrote in what became the most frequently cited passage of the report, "we appear to be treating the Jews as the Nazis treated them except that we do not exterminate them."⁷ In deference to the outraged response to the report, which was published in full in the *New York Times* on September 30, 1945, Jews were then accommodated in separate Jewish camps with greater attention to the specific nature of Jewish wartime suffering. The separate Jewish camps became, according to recent scholarship, sites of

⁵ Pamela Ballinger, "Impossible Returns, Enduring Legacies: Recent Historiography of Displacement and the Reconstruction of Europe after World War Two," *Contemporary European History* 22 (2013): 128–29. This growing historiography most notably includes work by Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Loring M. Danforth and Riki Van Boeschoten, *Children of the Greek Civil War: Refugees and the Politics of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Peter Gatrell, *Free World? The Campaign to Save the World's Refugees, 1956–1963* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Anna Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism: Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011); Ben Shephard, *The Long Road Home: The Aftermath of the Second World War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011); and Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe's Families after World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

⁶ Ballinger, "Impossible Returns," 129–32.

⁷ Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 138–39, 319n38. The full text of the report can be found at www.ushmm.org/dp/politic6.htm.



Figure 1. “Major Jewish DP Camps and Assembly Centers, 1945–46,” in United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Second Generation Advisory Group, and American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, *Life Reborn: Jewish Displaced Persons, 1945–1951. Historical Overview: International Conference, January 14–17, 2000, Washington, DC* (Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2000), 146.

identity reconstitution through interaction between the refugees and their administrators.⁸

In 1946, there were 30,372 Jewish DPs in Austria, the majority of them, nearly 30,000 people, located in the American occupation zone in Upper Austria.⁹ They were the third-largest group of Allied DPs, after

⁸ Ballinger, “Impossible Returns,” 129–32, 138; Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 139.

⁹ YIVO, RG 294.4, folder 6, “Report on A.J.D.C., Salzburg Area, Activities” by Leon D. Fisher, field director, A.J.D.C., Salzburg, December 10, 1946. There were about 7,000 Jewish DPs in Vienna, 1,500 in the French zone, and 3,500 in the British zone, and no figures available for the Russian zone.

non-Jewish Poles and non-German speakers from Yugoslavia. Former concentration camp inmates and Jewish refugees who arrived in Austria after the war from Poland, Hungary, Romania, and Czechoslovakia made up the Jewish DP population. Having been at home and seen the conditions there, Hungarian Jews who arrived after the war in the great wave of 1946 largely had no intention of returning. They fled from postwar pogroms—or in fear of their imminent outbreak—from postwar antisemitism, from catastrophic economic conditions including inflation that surpassed that in Germany after World War I, and the social-psychological trauma of confronting loss at home.¹⁰

“The surviving Jewish population of Hungary is in utter distress,” wrote the Budapest branch of the HICEM, describing immediate postwar conditions:

The survivors, returning from deportation, working camps or ghettos, have to continue their way of life [within] the same surroundings from [which] the [fascist] tormentors drove them away.... They see that their neighbors are living their undisturbed family life in their old homes, and at the same time they find in that old home only cold rooms, empty walls, if not a ruined, robbed and often burnt-down house. Their parents and their innocent children were swallowed by the gas-chambers and crematoriums of Auschwitz. Their wives died a martyr's death as living skeletons, humiliated and tortured.... Their brothers were killed by some sadist commander in the vast snow fields of Russia. There they are, liberated from the [torment] and slavery in the empty, cold family home, condemned to life.... To life, impossible to live. For it is hard to realize how one can live his life in a house, in a street, where every stone, every [piece of] furniture reminds him of the lost and beloved ones. Those men can only wish—and this is the wish of the greater part of Hungarian Jews—to get away from here, away into far lands, where the surroundings do not remind them of the happy past and the tragic present. To emigrate to a country where he can begin a new life,

¹⁰ Michael John, “Upper Austria, Intermediate Stop: Reception Camps and Housing Schemes for Jewish Displaced Persons and Refugees in Transit,” *The Journal of Israeli History* 19.3 (1998): 18.

and where he has not to fight against the thousand sweet and tragic [memories] of the past.

This is the only solution in very many cases, for the reason [that] one cannot live [a balanced life] in a country among such people ... in whom his confidence is shaken, and where he has to answer the constant question, what was this “good friend” or “this old neighbor” like when [fascism] raged? Was the neighbor, the friend from old times, a humane being, or is he responsible for the [events] by his activity or his passivity? It is clear that these psychological circumstances [greatly hinder reintegration into society]. The only solution [to] this problem is emigration. Psychologically, only emigration can save these people from ... mental breakdown.¹¹

Great numbers of surviving Jews who returned to Hungary came to the conclusion that emigration was inevitable and an existential necessity. They left weekly by the hundreds, heading to the “territories of the deportation,” back to Germany and to the DP countries. They “liquidated everything which bound them to their former country” to make a risky trip in the hope that overseas immigration would be forthcoming. They called this the “Black Alijah.”¹²

Between July and September 1946, the Joint in Austria struggled to meet the needs of the nearly 27,000 Jewish refugees fleeing conditions in Eastern Europe. The influx was unpredicted, supplies of food and clothing low, and staffing insufficient. The US Army quickly opened four transit camps on the outskirts of Linz to handle the influx, including the one at Enns, all of which soon were taxed beyond capacity. The Joint lamented the “ridiculously inadequate” supplies, and how it at first “failed hopelessly and completely to meet the demands of the starving, disturbed, transient population.”¹³ By mid-September the US Army and the Joint reported the situation under control, and the five Jewish transit camps were in full operation. Housing and sanitation conditions gradually improved, and people in the camps began to take part in religious and

¹¹ YIVO, RG 245.5 HIAS HICEM France IV, folder 228, “Report on the Activity of the Office of the HICEM [HIAS-ICA-Emigration Association] in Budapest, Hungary, from April till December 31, 1945.”

¹² Ibid.

¹³ YIVO, RG 294.4, folder 6, “Report.”

social activities. Some expressed interest in pursuing vocational and educational programs. But morale was very low.¹⁴

The territory of the then American zone in Austria to which the Jewish refugees fled was grotesquely familiar. The site of concentration camps during the Nazi era, it had been the endpoint of the Hungarian Jewish death marches in early 1945 before liberation. With funds from the Joint, Jewish DPs and refugees in Austria put up a monument to all the Jews who perished during the Nazi regime at Ebensee. The monument was unveiled on the first anniversary of the liberation.¹⁵ “Dear Laci,” began a letter to Enns, Green Shelter in August 1946,

I was glad to receive your letter, and I am happy to hear you are well. So, you are near that cursed Mathausen [sic] again where we suffered together. The landscape before you is not unknown. I would also like to visit our former torture chamber once again in my life, but I would like to see our former tormentors suffer through the same as they did to us and our relatives. It is rather disturbing that even now after so much suffering you still have no home. My dear Laci, I am going to make inquiries on your behalf through a friend at the Austrian consulate. Sári néni writes that they are living in very poor circumstances [in Hungary]. I am somehow managing.¹⁶

Laci never received the letter, and it is probable that he moved on, whether or not with the help of the contact at the Austrian consulate. Enns was a transit camp. And Upper Austria was an undesirable location. Many DPs moved rapidly from Austria to preferred camps and centers in Germany and Italy, the other “DP countries.” Germany seemed a “liberal haven” in contrast to conditions in Austria. It was well-known that Austria hosted the refugees only with great reluctance.¹⁷

Politically, the Allies considered Austria a liberated country, based on the premise that it was an occupied and unwilling partner of Nazi Germany. They wished to give Austria the chance for democratic development. Yet observers indicated that they had not yet seen any evidence

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ YIVO, RG 294.4, folder 448, August 26, 1946.

¹⁷ Tara Zahra, “Prisoners of the Postwar: Expellees, Displaced Persons, and Jews in Austria after World War II,” *Austrian History Yearbook* 41 (2010): 191.

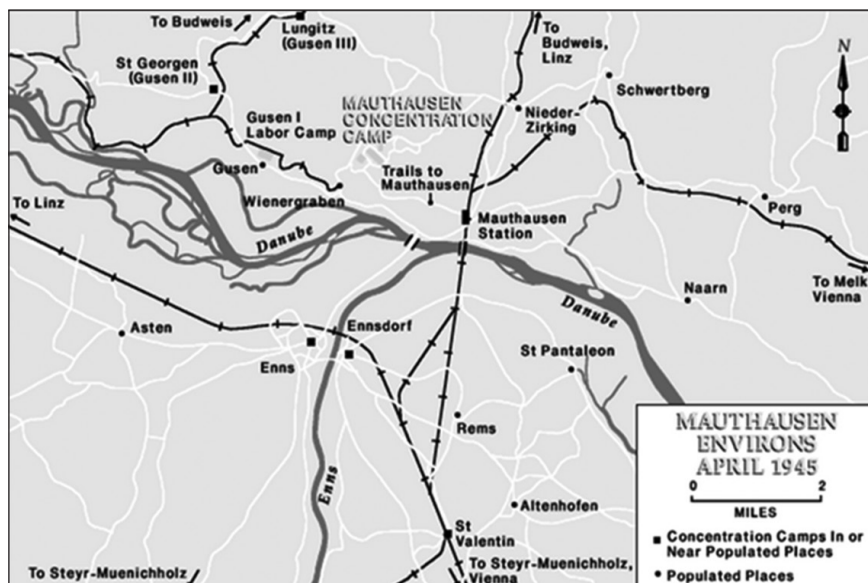


Figure 2. Mauthausen Environs, April 1945, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media_nm.php?MediaId=416.

of that development. "The necessity of living in Austria for Jews holds no interest or satisfaction for them. This is a hostile, basically antisemitic country," wrote the Joint field director, "They know too well that the Austrian people resent their very existence here and constantly agitate for their removal."¹⁸ Enns was guarded by the US military, and had extraterritorial status. Its inhabitants were housed in a former barracks, rather than in huts, which was usually the case. Yet the quality of life was low, and the camp sometimes suffered from terrible overcrowding.¹⁹

By comparing Hungarian-language materials at Enns in with those of the other DP camps and centers, with statistical data on arrivals, with lists of names, and with other evidence including meeting minutes, protocols, and the largely Hungarian-language cache of undelivered mail, it becomes apparent that Enns was a central gathering point for Hungarian-speaking Jewish refugees in the Austrian DP camp system. Jewish refugees at Enns learned from Hungarian-language announcements, for example, that ciga-

¹⁸ YIVO, RG 294.4, folder 6, "Report."

¹⁹ John, "Upper Austria," 25–28.

rettes would be distributed only between 8 and 9 in the morning, and only to persons who had filed their papers in the main office.²⁰ Hungarian Jews were active in the Jewish camp leadership at Enns, organizing supplies, work, and issues related to hygienic conditions.²¹

At Enns, tensions were high between the Polish Jews and the Hungarian Jews, as the Polish Jews felt the “assimilationists” were preferred, and got “twice as much,” while doling out curses against the Polish Jews, and occupying all key positions. Meeting minutes spelled out the strained relationships between the Polish and Hungarian Jews in the overcrowded camp, laying the blame for the tensions at the feet of the Hungarian Jews:

The situation here is so bad it is hard to imagine.... Unfortunately a rift has developed among the Jews. The few Polish Jews who are cooperating there are harassed by their Hungarian Jewish colleagues and cursed verbally with all sorts of words used against them in the German period.... From young to old, the Hungarian Jews are preferred and get twice as much [as the Poles]. The assimilationists are creating an abyss.²²

Nevertheless, after the Harrison Report all Hungarian-speaking Jews, Jews from Hungary, and Jews from Poland, Romania, and Czechoslovakia were classified within the broader category of “Jewish” in the DP camp system. Their wartime experience and then the postwar policy toward them, the aid available to them (including an 800-calorie supplement to their camp diet), the parameters of their postwar fate, the view of the surrounding society, the options before them, and how they shaped their strategies for rebuilding their lives were based upon their classification as “Jewish,” however they wished to interpret or act on it.

This was a pronounced change for Jews coming from the territory of interwar Hungary where “Jewish” had not existed as a category of nationality declaration, whether counted on the census according to language usage (i.e., Poland) or directly (i.e., Czechoslovakia). “Jewish” nationality was a new category of political nationhood created for the Jews of East-Central Europe after the First World War, and based on newly established minority rights protections and a broad range of late-

²⁰ YIVO, RG 294.4, folder 406, “Értésítés.”

²¹ YIVO, RG 294.4, folder 431, minutes from the camp leadership meeting at Enns August 30, 1946.

²² John, “Upper Austria,” 28. From meeting minutes 1946.



Figure 3. Jewish DPs are gathered at the entrance to the office of the camp commander at the Enns displaced persons camp. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Wolfgang Schaechter.

nineteenth-century Jewish national movements. Unlike Jews elsewhere in interwar East-Central Europe, the historically assimilationist Jewish population within the reduced borders of interwar Hungary energetically rejected “Jewish” as a national category. Most Jews from pre-World War I Hungary did not even have contact with international Jewish organizations until 1918, when the Central Hungarian Jewish Association appealed to Jews in the Entente countries to save Hungary from imminent territorial loss.²³

²³ YIVO, RG348, Wolf-Mowshowitch collection, box 18, folder 160, “Memorandum of the Jews of Hungary to the Jews throughout the World,” the Central Hungarian Jewish Association (Magyar Zsidó Központi Szövetség).

Following the mainstream Hungarian Jewish line, they continued to believe that Magyarization, the key element of what Victor Karady has called the “assimilationist social contract,” was the only effective way to stanch and eliminate antisemitism in Hungary.²⁴ Only a small minority of Jews in pre–World War I Hungary showed any interest in a Jewish national movement that would force them to recognize themselves as members of a Jewish nation, rather than solely of a Hungarian one.²⁵ The main region in which Hungarian Jews did show significant interest in Zionism was formed from the northwestern counties of the country, centering around Pressburg (Pozsony, later Bratislava), which became part of Czechoslovakia after the First World War.²⁶

Jewish classification was now a marker used by the American occupation authorities and the Joint to accommodate these DPs’ specific needs and concerns that plainly intersected with their own understanding of the real options before them, and of what path they might beat away from Hungary and away from Enns. In this sense, it constituted a rupture in their experience of self-identification, though it remained primarily a practical—and not ideological—connection for postwar Hungarian Jewish refugees as they mapped and traveled the paths of postwar adaptation.

We do not see explicit references to Jewishness in the Hungarian-language letters to Enns, but rather intimate, practical, and emotional responses to their radically and tragically transformed world, and attempts to find normalcy within it. We are able to pick up one end of that connection through the dozens of undelivered letters found at Enns; focusing for the purposes of this chapter on that exchange with relatives and friends in Hungary in 1946 and 1947. There we see a change in tone in the letters.

²⁴ Victor Karady, “Religious Divisions, Socio-Economic Stratification and the Modernization of Hungarian Jewry after the Emancipation,” in *Jews in the Hungarian Economy, 1760–1945*, ed. Michael Silber (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992), 162. In his pivotal study, Karady explains the terms of the symbiotic relationship between the Hungarian government and the Jews before World War I: in return for the Jews’ political loyalty to the Hungarian national state, cultural Magyarization, and social assimilation, the Hungarian government offered the Jews protection from popular antisemitism and cleared a path for Jewish social mobility through education and religious equality.

²⁵ Gábor Schweitzer, “Miért nem kellett Herzl a magyar zsidóknak?” [Why did the Hungarian Jews reject Herzl?] *Budapest Negyed* (Spring 1995): 45.

²⁶ William O. McCagg, Jr., *A History of Habsburg Jews, 1670–1918* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 194.

At first they focused on a wide net of topics: concern about the addressee's whereabouts and health; passing on available travel information; news about visas, quotas, and conditions, and who could help them reach their destination; reports on efforts to be in touch, to send packages, and to take care of any promised favors; the sending of love and kisses; telling about the new babies coming into the world; and how deeply they are missed. Then they move to an increasingly concerted effort to entice them to come home to Hungary. Selected, representative passages follow. "My dear Ervin," wrote Éva in mid-August 1946 from Budapest,

I received three of your letters and a card today. I was so anxious wondering what happened to you and why you did not write.... I received a letter today from Béla too.... He writes that when you get there he will get all the papers you need.... If you think I do not miss you, you are very wrong, because I think of you all the time. I do not go anywhere.... [A]s we discussed, at noon I always think of you.... I was [at your mother's apartment] the day before yesterday. She was very happy. I ate apple soup, melon, and plum.... I think everyone is surprised that you left. I barely believe it.... My dear sweet one, I am worried about you; do not catch a cold; take care of yourself; get some warm things. Do you still have your boots or did they get destroyed? I washed and ironed your laundry and put it away.... [W]rite a lot and fast. Kisses from your loving Éva.²⁷

Lajos sent a letter to his Éva from Budapest at the end of August 1946,

Even after so many attempts [to send letters] we still don't know anything for certain.... You wrote to us on August 5th, as did Ági. Both letters arrived from Enns, although according to the American telegram that [we received] you cannot be there.... Now we don't actually know what is going on.... Vera brought a baby girl into the world on July 24th. She and the baby are fine. The baby weighed 3.0 kg at birth, and was 53 cm long. Now the little angel is 3.6 kg. This shows how healthy she is. There is enough food. Vera has bountiful milk.... As for me, I am

²⁷ YIVO RG 294.4, folder 448, letter to Ervin Fisher from Eva Reiner in Budapest, 1946.

somehow managing things.... [T]he prices are not cheap, but they are manageable.²⁸

“Dear Gyuri,” wrote Pista from Hajdúszoboszló near Debrecen in 1946,

Unfortunately, I have not been able to fulfill your requests. I was at the post office, but there was no way to send a package ... the car is still here.... [I tried to sell it] but there are no buyers. Unfortunately, it is not possible to get it started because there is no gasoline, and Pali said it is probably no good anymore since Biro pushed it home.... I have the grammar book, but I cannot send it.... I am happy to read that [our friend] has been successful in gaining passage to Australia.... [Another friend] is greeting you. He is going to America in the spring.... Very much looking forward to your letter. Write about everything.²⁹

In early 1947, a letter arrived for Laci from Budapest:

Maybe, my Laci, you are right and smart, and I should not be selfish and try to persuade you to come back home. If I only knew that you would succeed getting somewhere! But who knows how long it will take?... We are not freezing here because we have enough [fuel]; we are keeping warm—We hope that you are not cold.... I mailed a letter on the 11th, with ten cigarettes.³⁰

Here a Mr. Korocz writes to István Dudos of his own return to Erdőbénye in the Tokaj wine region of Hungary in January 1947.

I received the letter written by Klein, and now I can finally write to you all that I am home, thank God [*hála Istennek*], but I can tell you that on the way here we experienced many horrible things, but don't worry.... [I am pleased to be home].³¹

²⁸ YIVO RG 294.4, folder 449, letter to Hirsch Eva from Hirsch Lajos in Budapest, 1946.

²⁹ YIVO RG 294.4, folder 449, letter to György Ausserber from Pista in Hajdúszoboszló, 1946.

³⁰ YIVO RG 294.4, folder 448, letter from Budapest, January 1947.

³¹ YIVO RG 294.4, folder 448, letter to Stefan Dudos from Erdőbénye, Hungary, 1947.

The following passages come from a set of three letters to Laci and Kati from Budapest in early 1947, highlighting fluidity and terrible uncertainty:

I suggest that you return. Panni did, she is here in Pest. Though Dezső went to Germany, he is coming back [here] too and is bringing something from there.... I say you come back.... All the others can make ends meet, you will make ends meet, too.... Panni and her family have returned for good.... Klári already is expecting the baby next month.³²

.... It is very hard to get to America, I think it is better to create a life here, the situation is always getting better. Mostly [careerists] go to America. And as far as I know you do not have such ambitions. America is a capitalist country, and we do not know whether it wants progress or destruction. Fifteen million Jews live there. I am afraid there will be an even bigger Auschwitz. I hope this fear is only a nightmare, but unfortunately we cannot know anything.... [I]f you really must go somewhere, go to Palestine.... Here there is nothing new, we work hard, we live and are well. There are some good Russian films in the cinema. Tonight I am going to see *The Stone Flower*.³³

And at last a plea from little Zsiga:

Dear Laci and Kati, why don't you come home to play with me? I am so bored. These days Mom does not let me go anywhere to play.... [O]ne of my dolls is Piri, the second Sári, the third Éva, the fourth and biggest is Jutka. The radio works again. Bopi, Zsiga.³⁴

As these letters were written, the Cold War intensified. Hungary remained in what has been called a “kind of semi-democracy” through the summer of 1947, when Stalin shifted strategies, leaving behind Patriotic Front-style coalition policies. Mátyás Rákosi, the head of the Hungarian Com-

³² YIVO RG 294.4, folder 450, letter to Markovitz Laszlóné from Budapest, 1947.

³³ Ibid. According to an estimate in the *American Jewish Yearbook 2012*, very broadly defined, Jews in the United States today number 6,721,680. There are approximately 13 to 14 million Jews worldwide. *The Stone Flower* (1946) was a Soviet fantasy film by director Aleksander Ptushko. Based on a folktale by Pavel Bazhov, it was the USSR's first color movie shot on Agfa film seized in Germany.

³⁴ Ibid.

munist Party, had been preoccupied with the gradual erosion of the non-Communist leadership, informally known as his “salami tactics.”³⁵ The process accelerated as the police exposed a set of alleged anti-Soviet conspiracies engineered to bring down the popularly elected Smallholders’ Party. One last multiparty election took place in August 1947, though its results were predetermined to favor a Communist win. With Communist victory in hand, the other postwar parties were steadily dissolved, save for the Social Democratic Party, which merged with the Hungarian Communist Party in June 1948 to become the Hungarian Workers’ Party.

By summer 1948, the “Iron Curtain” was rapidly moving westward, and the state of Israel had come into existence. New York’s Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) was “sick at heart” over the developments in Poland, “a country from which so many Jews would like to emigrate,” and was informing itself about the regime change in Czechoslovakia.³⁶ The Polish premier already had informed HIAS that, as an American organization, its activities were “viewed with suspicion,” and “it would be highly desirable for [HIAS] to discontinue [its] activities.”³⁷ Similar positions in the other countries of the consolidating Eastern Bloc soon prevailed. Hungary arrested Israel Jacobson, the director of the Joint, on charges of espionage in December 1949. Poland expelled the Joint altogether, and nationalized its establishments, as soon did Czechoslovakia. The Joint ceased all activities in Hungary in 1953.³⁸

Legal channels of emigration contracted. Jews from Hungary who now tried to leave the country sought illegal passage through Bratislava to Vienna, a route that remained partially open until mid-1949 with the knowledge of the Hungarian Ministry of the Interior. Yehuda Bauer estimates that at least 30,000 Jews fled from Hungary in 1948 and 1949 until the semi-legal passage through Czechoslovakia was sealed, and that about 50,000 Jews left Hungary between the end of the Second World War and

³⁵ István Deák, “Hungarian Political Emigration and the Origins of the Cold War,” *Polish Review* 47.3 (2002): 329.

³⁶ YIVO RG 245.5 France IV HIAS HICEM, folder 405, letter from Isaac L. Asofsky, executive director of HIAS New York, to Lewis Neikrug, director of HIAS Paris.

³⁷ YIVO RG 245.5 France IV HIAS HICEM, folder 405, letter from Lewis Neikrug in Paris to Isaac Asofsky in New York.

³⁸ Oscar Handlin, *A Continuing Task: The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1914–1964* (New York: Random House, [1965, c. 1964]), 99, 108.



Figure 4. Alexander Schachter (center) meets with Jewish DPs as they prepare for their departure from the Enns displaced persons camp. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Wolfgang Schachter.

1956. Approximately 15,000 to 18,000 of them emigrated clandestinely to Palestine through Brichah organizational channels.³⁹ Many Hungarian Jews who emigrated to the newly established state of Israel saw it as a step toward eventual settlement in the United States. The US partially opened its doors in 1948 with the Displaced Persons Act, which allowed 200,000 DPs in, although only those who had acquired DP status before December 22, 1945. A reform to that law passed in 1950 allowed in further refugees who had acquired DP status by January 1, 1949. “The curtain has rung down on Calendar Year 1949,” wrote the HIAS director for Germany and Austria.⁴⁰ HIAS sought to “place the displaced” in 1949, settling the vast majority of DPs in the United States, followed with significantly smaller numbers to Canada, Australia, and other countries, many of them in South America.⁴¹

The intimate and compelling letters from Enns freeze in its tracks this story of overwhelming rupture, migration, and geopolitical transformation.

³⁹ Bauer, *Out of the Ashes*, 148–49.

⁴⁰ YIVO RG 245.5 France IV HIAS HICEM, folder 352, “Calendar Year 1949: Report from Germany and Austria,” by Henry Ortner, director HIAS Germany and Austria, to Lewis Neikrug, HIAS Paris, director general of European operations, January 4, 1950.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

We remember that most of all, after their bare physical needs were met, survivors craved contact. Contact was the thread of continuity, a means of chasing normalcy, of sketching out the terrain and strategies of adaptation to a destroyed world. Written in 1946 and 1947, these letters capture the fluctuations and uncertainties of the years between the end of the Second World War and the drawing down of the Iron Curtain. We hear the letter writers' voices clearly before the survivors' paths diverge.

IV.
THE MEMORY OF
THE HOLOCAUST

Hungarian Memory of the Holocaust in Hungary

Gábor Gyáni

Among the topics which have been discussed in dealing with today's memorialization practices, one of the most important is the official memory of the past. This is true of Holocaust memory studies internationally as well as in Hungary. Regarding the treatment of memory studies in Hungary, one must admit that the most detailed and thoroughgoing descriptions and analyses of the historical policy in terms of the Jewish genocide during World War II were achieved more by foreign than by Hungarian historians. The first to be cited in the field was a German-language monograph published by an Austrian historian, Regina Fritz.¹ In it Fritz described the trajectory of how the Hungarian Communist political elite sustained their image of the past by instrumentalizing historical memory. She followed the story starting when the war ended until well into the 1990s, in the aftermath of the 1989 political shift. Fritz claimed that renewed public interest in the Holocaust reappeared as late as the 1970s and especially the 1980s after the deep amnesia imposed on it, a pause beginning at the late 1940s. The collapse of Communist rule brought the story into a totally new phase, giving rise both to a live public discussion and commemoration of the Jewish tragedy. Since that time a kind of state memory politics of the Hungarian Holocaust is on the agenda, as shown by the growing number of monuments dedicated to the memory of the Jewish victims of the war as well as the declaration of the Holocaust Day ceremony to be held in schools.

¹ Regina Fritz, *Nach Krieg und Judenmord. Ungarns Geschichtspolitik seit 1944* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2012).

The British Holocaust historian, Tim Cole, who specializes in researching the history of the ghettos in Hungary established for the Jews in the course of 1944,² has considered the monuments erected in Budapest during the Communist period. He raised the question of how and to what extent the organized memory (that is, the official memory) transformed the sites in the city where the atrocities were actually committed against the Jews in 1944 and 1945 to a kind *lieux de memoire*. The places concerned were the sites of the ghettos that had been established at different parts in the Pest side of the city. Cole found that the initial commemorative efforts made by the authorities erased rather than fixed the “Jewish” specificity of the Holocaust. These monuments memorialized the victims of fascism (defined very broadly) and stressed the great role that the “Soviet liberators” played by freeing the Jewish dwellers of the Pest ghettos. This way of commemorating the Holocaust was then a general practice in all of the countries of the Soviet bloc. Change occurred in Hungary during the late 1980s with the arrival of explicit reference to the Jewish victims of the war events. The shift in memory politics was, however, coupled with a much greater focus placed on the role of the rescuers in the whole story, the paradigmatic case being the memory of Raoul Wallenberg. There also appeared an endeavor to nationalize the memory of World War II by Magyarizing the notion of victimhood. It amounted to restricting the Hungarian perpetrators who committed the atrocities against the Jews to particular social and political forces (the Hungarian fascists, the Arrow Cross Party / Nyilaskeresztes Párt). This tendency was further strengthened by commemorating the gentile victims of the war.

Academic historical scholarship exhibited little interest in the history of the Holocaust for a long time. Accordingly, research into the memory of the Holocaust is among the most neglected areas in history writing in Hungary even today.³ This situation may derive in part from the difficulty of facing up to the complicity of both the Hungarian state authorities (including the gendarmerie) and ordinary citizens, as perpetrators or bystanders, in the genocide (and, of course, the durable discrimination) of the Hungarian Jewry. The case has correctly been characterized by a

² Tim Cole, *Holocaust City: The Making of a Jewish Ghetto* (Routledge, New York, 2003); Tim Cole, *Traces of the Holocaust: Journeying in and out of the Ghettos* (London: Continuum, 2011).

³ Among the few exceptions one may mention: Gerhard Seewann and Éva Kovács, “Juden und Holocaust in der ungarischen Erinnerungskultur seit 1945,” *Südosteuropa* 54.1 (2006): 24–59.

Western analyst who stated: "The Holocaust became sidelined, distorted or ignored in public discourse and in textbooks, which ignored the Hungarians' role as collaborators as well."⁴

The striking indifference to and the deep silence imposed by the Communist historical policy on the Jewish Holocaust may best be described by the fact that even the first Marxist synthetic master narrative of Hungary's history, a two-volume work appearing in 1964, did not find the topic worth of a lengthy discussion: only twenty-one lines were devoted to it, and within that no more than twelve lines addressed the events of the deportation of around half a million Hungarian Jews of the countryside being sent to the death camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau. The strikingly short passage telling the story of the Holocaust events looked like a news item and lacked any interpretation and argumentation.⁵ About this time, Elek Karsai, an archivist historian, coordinated a project to publish source material related to the deportation and ghettoization of the countryside Jews and the policy of discrimination against the Jews in Hungary from the late 1930s. Although it was a nonacademic research project, a large amount of archival source material was collected and made available. This work, however, was independent of official (academic bound) historical scholarship and was financed by a Hungarian Jewish committee.⁶

György Ránki, then a young historian, was the first to break the academic silence by publishing a book in 1968 on the question of how Nazi Germany had occupied Hungary in 1944. Ránki dedicated a whole chapter (thirty-six pages) to telling the history of the atrocities committed against the Hungarian Jewry in 1944. His account was the first scholarly discussion of the theme written by a Hungarian historian in Hungary.⁷ The Holocaust did not receive any further serious attention at this time from any domestic historian.

⁴ Thomas C. Fox, "The Holocaust under Communism," in *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, ed. Dan Stone (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), 431.

⁵ Erik Molnár, ed., *Magyarország története* [History of Hungary], 2 vols. (Budapest: Gondolat, 1964), vol. 2, 456.

⁶ Ilona Beneschofsky and Elek Karsai, eds., *Vádirat a náciizmus ellen. Dokumentumok a magyarországi zsidóüldözés történetéhez* [Indictment against Nazism: Documents for the study of the history of the persecution of the Jews in Hungary], 2 vols. (Budapest: Magyar Izraeliták Országos Képviselőlete, 1958–60). Two additional volumes were published in the same organizational context.

⁷ György Ránki, *1944. március 19. (Magyarország német megszállása)* [March 19, 1944 (German occupation of Hungary)] (Budapest: Kossuth, 1968), 156–92. The book was reprinted in the 1970s.

With the appearance of Randolph Braham's monumental book in the United States in the early 1980s, the situation changed substantially. Ránki's immediate reaction to Braham's work was the self-critical observation that this book should have had already been written by a Hungarian historian living in Hungary. Ránki added that Braham's monograph was a great challenge to Hungarian history writing, one that it had to respond to as quickly as possible. This, however, Ránki admitted, would indeed be difficult because Hungarian historians were expected to navigate between the cliffs of the philo-Semitism and antisemitism.⁸ Not too long after that a conference was organized on the topic in Jerusalem with the inclusion of several Hungarian and Israeli historians. This was fast succeeded by another discussion held in New York City where many other historians specialized in Holocaust studies were also present. Ránki's eminent role in initiating and supporting these international discussions on the history of the Holocaust was enormous. It followed from his own personal experience; he had been deported to Auschwitz (and was later taken to Germany to become a slave laborer).⁹ Braham's narrative was much later translated and published in Hungary, which gave further impetus to the historical research of the Holocaust in Hungary.

The emergence of the Holocaust as a distinct and engaging problem both in public opinion and in scholarly discourse occurred in the West (in West Germany and the United States alongside Israel) at the same time as it did in Hungary. Before then, the silence imposed on the issue, the striking neglect showed towards it, lasted for about a decade and a half after the late 1940s. Hungarian memory politics in terms of the Holocaust was thus not wholly a unique phenomenon. Readiness for forgetting rather than remembering the immense sufferings of the Jews in Hungary during World War II was underlined by the almost general amnesia in connection with the war. One may even add: memory of the Great War, together with its close consequence, the Peace Treaty of Trianon was also devised to be

⁸ Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary*, 3 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981); György Ránki, "Magyar Holocaust" [Hungarian Holocaust], *Élet és Irodalom* 26.25 (1982): 7–8 (republished in György Ránki, *A Harmadik Birodalom árnyékában* [In the shadow of the Third Reich] [Budapest: Magvető, 1988], 195–210).

⁹ See Gábor Gyáni, "Történetíró a diktatúra korában. Ránki György élete és munkássága" [A historian in the age of a dictatorship: György Ránki's life and historical scholarship], in *A felhalmozás míve. Történeti tanulmányok Kövér György tiszteletére* [The trajectory of accumulation: Historical studies in honor of György Kövér], ed. Károly Halmos, et al. (Budapest: Századvég, 2009), 540.

wholly forgotten by the work of the Communist historical policy. Although, the historical fact that Hungary then lost 71 percent of her former territory, with a corresponding loss of 64 percent of her population, resulted in a deep psychological shock to the twentieth- (and twenty-first) century Hungarian historical awareness and national identity, which was especially acute during the interwar period (and now seems to have revived again).

To be more precise, the issue of history of World War II was not totally absent from contemporary communicative and cultural memory (a few monuments were even set up to commemorate the event, including the Jewish genocide), but the way this past was approached did not allow any room for keeping in memory the variety of the Hungarian victims of the wartime events. It followed from Hungary's very special case as a nation that was defeated in the war by the Soviet Union, a situation that prevented its people from vindicating their rights as victims, a status which the people of neighboring countries, such as the Poles or the Czechs, were unambiguously entitled to claim. The many suffering attached to the events of World War II even in this country, including the Jewish genocide, was thus eliminated from the narratives produced about the war, and it was replaced by a master narrative called the Great Patriotic War. Accordingly, deep silence was to become the rule in sensitive matters, such as the victimhood of the Hungarian soldiers who died in great numbers not exclusively at the front, but even at POW camps in the Soviet Union. Similar oblivion was sanctioned in terms of civilian victims of the war, dying due to the bombings both of Budapest and the provincial cities, or as being brought to *malenkij robot* in the aftermath of the war. And, finally, not too many words were allowed to be heard in connection with Jewish victimhood. The ruling canon of how to tell the story of World War II led in this way to canceling the overall memory of the sufferings of the people of a defeated country like Hungary, and this amnesia was extended to some extent to the Jewish victims.

Some modest changes occurred at the beginning of the 1970s with the appearance of the late István Nemeskürty's *Requiem egy hadseregért* (Requiem for an army). This book described the fate of a great many Hungarian soldiers serving in the war. Nemeskürty's attempt to open up the topic of Hungarian victimhood during World War II focused on the tragedy of the Hungarian Second Army, which was destroyed at the River Don during the first few months of 1943. Nemeskürty claimed that the long-lasting silence imposed on the victimhood of the soldiers (the number of the dead among them might even reach 100,000, according to his own estimation), began at the moment when the army had to cease to exist. This oblivion, one might add, was an uninterrupted process lasting until

the publication of his book in 1972. Nemeskürty insisted that “*these people, this hundred thousand males, should be mourned, because they were victims.*”¹⁰

The dramatic account provided by this book was a trumpet call to create a cult of the fallen Hungarian soldiers of World War II. This initiation was immediately furthered by a made-for-TV film shot by the well-known director and cameraman Sándor Sára. This film, which lasted for several hours, was titled *Pergőtűz (a 2. magyar hadsereg pusztulása a Donnál)* (Drum fire [The Destruction of the Hungarian Second Army at the River Don]). It was based on interviews with a few surviving soldiers of the Hungarian Second Army. When the film appeared on TV, the visual-oral testimonies transmitting the historical experiences that the soldiers gained both as warriors and POWs in the Soviet Union, had a significant impact on the public by making available many fresh and surprising historical “facts.” The film broke the silence surrounding the topic of Hungarian victimhood during the war and contributed to the rekindling of a sense of national identity, which had suffered from bearing the burden of the forced awareness of collective sinfulness.¹¹ The importance of all this in view of changing the then prevailing attitude to the memory of the Hungarian Holocaust was evident.

The positive public reception of such an insistence on the notion of a true Hungarian victimhood connected to World War II was quickly met and brought further by historians who welcomed the revitalized interest in the collective experience of the past. Gyula Juhász, an authoritative historian at that time and a specialist in the history of the foreign policy and war diplomacy of the Horthy era, argued that “this war has not yet been articulated and so the work ought to begin now.” The task which is waiting for us historians, he explained, is not to identify heroes and/or villains, but to enable “the ordinary man ... [who] was afraid, who did his task or the one he thought he had to do” to finally be given a voice so that he could be heard after so many years of total silence. For, Juhász added, he has the right to tell the story of his experiences, traumatic as they may have been.¹²

¹⁰ István Nemeskürty, *Requiem egy hadseregért* [Requiem for an army] (Budapest: Magvető, 1972), 9 (italics in the original).

¹¹ Iván Sándor, “A föld alá vitt tények üzenete (Don-kanyar)” [Message of the facts brought under the ground (the Don-bend)], in *A történelem gépanyala. Válogatott esszék* [The machine angel of history: Selected essays], ed. Iván Sándor (Budapest: L’Harmattan, 2013), 33.

¹² Gyula Juhász, “Előszó” [Preface], in *Pergőtűz. A 2. magyar hadsereg pusztulása a Donnál* [Drum fire: The destruction of Hungarian Second Army at the River Don], ed. Sándor Sára (Budapest: Tinódi, 1988), 8.



Two theoretical questions should be raised before going into the details of how Hungarian historical memory embraced the Holocaust experience. One of the most basic problems has always been connected to understanding how private memory (remembering *per se*) is born, and which are the mechanisms making possible its rendering as a public (social, collective) memory. A further, not less important, issue concerns the relationship between the collected and collective memory of the Jewish *and* non-Jewish victims of World War II?

No public memory can exist in the (total) absence of personal memory (remembering). While it is true that the official kind of public memory, the so-called *Geschichtspolitik* (the politics of history)¹³ generated and sustained by the state, may come into existence even without the necessary support of a kind of collective or social memory. Official memory politics, however, may assist or, conversely, restrict the process of establishing collective memory, and indirectly may have some influence even on articulating private memory. The latter is happening now in regards to Holocaust private memory throughout the world, including Hungary. One may add that collective (or social) memory may also facilitate the personal memorialization process, manifesting itself through biographic remembering. The essence of their reciprocal relationship means that collective memory regularly fulfills the function of generalizing the highly scattered, even contradictory and always particular individual pieces of remembrance.¹⁴

¹³ The term *Geschichtspolitik* refers here to the broad use of history for political purposes. For more about the term, see Alexei Miller, "Historical Politics: Eastern European Convolutions in the 21st Century," in *The Convolutions of Historical Politics*, ed. Alexei Miller and Maria Lipman (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2012), 1–2.

¹⁴ The argument advanced here relies on the following studies: Aleida Assmann, "Gedächtnis ohne Erinnerung? Die Probleme der Deutschen mit ihrer Geschichte," *Gedenkstätten-Rundbrief* 97.10 (2000): 3–13; Susan A. Crane, "Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory," *American Historical Review* 102.5 (1997): 1372–85; Alon Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method," *American Historical Review* 102.5 (1997): 1386–1403; Wulf Kunsteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies," *History and Theory* 41.2 (2002): 179–97; Tim Cole, "Scales of Memory, Layers of Memory: Recent Works on Memories of the Second World War and the Holocaust," *Journal of Contemporary History* 37.1 (2002): 129–38.

The myriad personal remembrances coming to light through the aide of biographic memory constitute the hinterland of any sort of collective memory. Biographic memory is thus the sole medium making it possible to reach back to the once existing primary (authentic) historical experience that has gone away forever. By playing such a role, biographic memory provides us with a *secondary* experience of history, representing (more closely: replacing) the idea (or spirit) of the original, the authentic historical experience, the *sensation* of the historical agents (as Wilhelm Dilthey has described it). Therefore, biographic memory as holding direct contact with the past realm in this way, is necessarily segmented, plural, and particular. Collective memory, constructed retrospectively, performs the work of collecting, homogenizing, and representing diverse individual past experiences (remembrances). This is how the mechanism of the memory works, based first upon personal remembering and then proceeding toward the collective form of memory. This explains why the work of memory, which begins with sensation and ends with a retrospective keeping of the past in mind, should obviously be discontinuous.¹⁵ Not even the communicative form of collective memory may be devoid of a conscious act of “preserving memory.”¹⁶ Considering all this helps make clear how making personal testimonies on the experience of Jewish suffering available to the public can play a very special role in the process of generating a distinct Holocaust consciousness.

Two telling examples may be mentioned regarding the case of how the memory of both Jewish and gentile victims of World War II has been maintained following the tragic historical events of the war. The German (more exactly, the West German) memory of the war (and of the Holocaust) was long characterized and even defined not simply by forgetting, but rather by *selective recollection*. This meant that it was not the Jews, the true victims of Nazi Germany, but the German people themselves who occupied the position of the victim, who were thus remembered both publicly and privately. German POWs and the large masses of the German

¹⁵ Reinhart Koselleck, “Die Diskontinuität der Erinnerung,” *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 47.2 (1999): 213–22.

¹⁶ On the notion of communicative (and cultural) memory, see Jan Assmann, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” *New German Critique* 65 (Spring–Summer 1995): 125–33. Accordingly, Halbwachs’s notion of collective memory, which more or less corresponds to the tradition upheld by the ‘social frameworks’ (family, religion, estate, class), needs to be revised or entirely refuted, at least in terms of the modern form of collective memory. See Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 182–89.

diaspora population who were persecuted and expelled from East and Central Europe and transplanted to the territory of West Germany in the aftermath of the war represented the victims of World War II in the West German mind.¹⁷ Only much later, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, did German memory politics turn to the Jews as representing the proper victims of the Nazi terror.¹⁸ The “German memory of World War II” was accordingly shaped and dominated until the late 1960s by remembering (and mourning) German victims only.

An alternative way of memorializing the Holocaust occurred in the East European countries and constituted the Communist pattern of historical politics in terms of the Holocaust. This also involved, more or less, suppressing memories of the war as well as avoiding reference to the victimhood of the people who otherwise committed atrocities against the Jews. This memorialization (or, more precisely, this “forgetting strategy”) sometimes took the form of declaring the principle of collective culpability of the whole nation which collaborated with Nazi Germany, as in the case of Hungary, which was held to be the “last satellite of Germany.” Within this construct there was, however, an obvious effort to reduce the perpetrator’s responsibility, that of the elites and the average citizens alike, by supposing their innocence, with the exceptions of a few fascists, who were the “true” perpetrators. This method of neutralizing the awkward memory of the national engagement with the criminal acts of the past was also strengthened by emphasizing the great role that the antifascist forces played, a group allegedly led exclusively by the Communists. The latter form of identity politics led, within a short time (even before the 1950s), to dropping the memory of Jewish victimhood altogether.

The partial or total lack of keeping in mind the memory of Jewish suffering and mass death, the Holocaust in its entirety, lasted until the 1960s and, in several areas, well into the 1970s. Similar amnesia affected the memory of many other, non-Jewish victims of the war, including the

¹⁷ Robert G. Moeller, “The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany,” *American Historical Review* 101.4 (1996): 1008–48.

¹⁸ A vast historical literature discusses the question. For example, see Claudia Koonz, “Between Memory and Oblivion: Concentration Camps in German Memory,” in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 258–80; Mary Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999); Geoff Eley, “The Past under Erasure? History, Memory, and the Contemporary,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 46.3 (2011): 555–73.

soldiers who died in large number at the front or who became POWs in the Soviet Union. That was the case especially in a country like Hungary, which was held to be responsible for her own sufferings as it collaborated up to the last moment with Nazi Germany.¹⁹

The first signs of creating a public Holocaust discourse in Hungary appeared as late as the sixties in the form of artistic representations. For example, Jorge Semprún's *Le grand voyage* (1963), a fictionalized retelling of his deportation and incarceration in Buchenwald, was published in Hungary in 1964. The book became a cult text. The first movie wholly dedicated to depicting the Hungarian (civilian) complicity in the action of sending half a million Jewish fellow citizens to Auschwitz-Birkenau, *Utószezon* (Late season), directed by Zoltán Fábri, appeared in Hungarian cinemas in 1967. Fábri's film reached an even wider audience than Semprún's novel as 400,000 cinema-goers went to see it.²⁰ This seems to indicate that there has been some change in the prevailing official attitude to the issue of the Jewish persecution (and the overall historical fate of the Jews) in the Hungarian past.²¹

The following decade brought a real tide of the partly fictional, partly documentary biographic memory literature in Hungary. Due to the publication of a wide range of personal testimonies, Holocaust discourse became a real (and legitimate) public event. All this happened, seen from an analytic viewpoint, under the shadow (or maybe the light) of the borderline separating "communicative" and "cultural" memory from each other, influenced

¹⁹ György Ránki was the historian who most explicitly dealt with the problem of collaboration and the problem of the so-called "space for maneuver" given to Hungary at that time: Ránki, *A Harmadik Birodalom árnyékában* (1988), 5–178.

²⁰ For a detailed description and analysis of Fábri's product placed in this context, see Máté Zombory, András Lénárt, and Anna Lujza Szász, "Elfeledett szembenézés. Holokauszt és emlékezés Fábri Zoltán *Utószezon* c. filmjében" [Evaded self-scrutiny: The Holocaust and memory in *Late Season*, directed by Zoltán Fábri], *BUKSZ (Budapesti Könyvszemle)* 25.3 (2013): 245–56; András Lénárt, "'Perek.' A holokauszt tematizálásának példái a hatvanas évek magyarországi nyilvánosságában," ['Suits'. Examples of thematizing the Holocaust in the Hungarian public in the sixties], in *A forradalom ígérete? Történelmi és nyelvi események kereszteződésai* [Promise of the Revolution? Intersections of historical and linguistic events], ed. Tibor Bónus, Csongor Lőrincz, and Péter Szirák (Budapest: Ráció Kiadó, 2014), 511–37.

²¹ The best historical account on the official "Jewish policy" of the Communist regime in Hungary is András Kovács, "Magyar zsidó politika a háború végétől a kommunista rendszer bukásáig," [Hungarian Jewish Policy since the End of the War till the Fall of the Communist System], *Múlt és Jövő* 3 (2003): 5–39.

by the *floating gap*, the meeting point of the orally transmitted tradition (the authentic memory of the past), and the written or at least artistically and scholarly depicted past realm.²² Starting in the 1970s quite a large number of texts on Holocaust memory started to appear in book form, making available the authentic experiences of the Jewish victims of the Nazis and their Hungarian collaborators to a reading audience. The varied manifestations of such a biographic memory provided ample evidence for the Jewish historical experiences linked to the fatal and lethal events of 1944/45, the ghettoization, and its consequence, the deportation to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

An incomplete list of important works includes the following novels, *Terelőút* (Driving road) by György Gera (1972), *A tolmács* (The translator) by Ágnes Gergely (1973), *Hajtűkanyar* (Hairpin bend), a documentary fiction by Mária Ember (1974), *Sorstalanság* (Fatelessness), a biographic novel written by Imre Kertész (1975), *Az első évtized* (The first decade) by Pál Bárdos (1975), and the narrative *Szemüveg a porban* (Spectacle in the dust), produced by Ervin Gyertyán (1975). These and other texts published in the first few years of the 1970s were joined by memoirs such as *Vándorló fegyház* (Wandering penitentiary) by György Markos (1971), *Miskolc, Nyizsnyij, Tagil, Miskolc* by György Fazekas (1979), and the narrative *Mozgó vesztőhely* (Mobile scaffold), written by Elemér Sallai (1979). A few diaries were also made public at that time, like the one published by a Transylvanian publisher in Hungarian.²³

The shocking narratives of individual Jewish life stories did indeed have a great impact, far deeper than any historian's account could do. The reason for it is that while the latter can generate, at best, a "cognitive learning process" in the audience, a fictional or quasi-fictional narrative is able to capture the total imagination and affective household of the reader. As a result, somebody becoming familiar with these narratives may thus discern the true victimhood of the people from the past referred to in the biographic memorial. It follows from the effective way of ascribing specific meaning rhetorically to history through some individual images.²⁴

²² The notion of the *floating gap* was used with such a meaning in Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1992), chap. 2.

²³ Ágnes Rózsa, *Űvölösök. Nürnbergi lágernapló 1944–45* [Lying in wait for the future: Camp diary from Nuremberg, 1944–45] (Bucharest: Kriterion, 1971).

²⁴ Alvin K. Rosenfeld, *The End of the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), chap. 8.

In addition, national myths and ideologies represented by the official war memory have been acutely refuted by the historical “facts” presented in the firsthand accounts of the Holocaust, which was a new sensation for those who formerly had no access to the experiences of the “limit event” of the Holocaust. The conflict between the two constructs of the historical past might prompt many to self-revise their view of the awkward past of their own country and the people living there (including their own ancestors). When history comes to be seen not exclusively from the single perspective of the perpetrators, but also from the angle of the victims, the shift of the viewpoint may lead many to be more aware of the truly tragic sense of that particular past. In this process it becomes easier to feel empathy for the victims who suffered so much from the misdeeds of the perpetrators, much easier than by merely knowing what really happened in the past. All of this may even lodge a degree of guilt in the consciences of the bystanders and their descendants. The textual testimonies of these biographic memories and the many other forms of memorial manifestations of the sinful past of the nation could thus enable the audience to connect with the retraumatized experience of that historical past.²⁵ The question, however, still remains to be answered: What further factors are needed to entail such an identification with past victimhood when consuming the artistic representations of the Holocaust experiences? The generation shift may, in fact, facilitate the evolution of such an attitude, as some scholars suggest. For example, it may have contributed to the success of West Germany to “come to terms with its past” in the last few decades of the twentieth century. As Jörn Rüsen has claimed: “The pre-given temporal chain of generations is the channel through which this event [the Holocaust] is related to the external and internal circumstances under which the German have to live.”²⁶

Another possible explanation concerns the ever changing meaning of history, which has a lot to do with the incessantly moving temporal

²⁵ The problem of post-Holocaust trauma has more recently been conceptualized in a novel way by the theory of the “cultural trauma” Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Remembering the Holocaust. A Debate*, with commentaries by Martin Jay, Bernhard Giesen, Michael Rothberg, Robert Manne, Nathan Glazer, Elihu Katz, and Ruth Katz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²⁶ Jörn Rüsen, “Holocaust-Memory and German Identity: Three Forms of Generational Practices,” in *Proceedings Actes: 19th International Congress of Historical Sciences, Department of History, University of Oslo*, ed. Anders Jølstad and Marianne Lunde (Oslo, 2000), 134.

perspective from which the same past is viewed. The changing temporal horizon on the basis of which the past is examined creates and increases the plurality of the meaning of history. As people become more and more familiar with subsequent events and processes which follow the actual past studied by the historian, these additional “facts” of an after-history offer alternative (and plausible) images of the historical past to the one known (and available) to the actors living in and experiencing the primary context of history. Consequently, the historical facts constructed retrospectively by the historians are not necessarily the same ones already available to the historical actors who were personally involved in the past events and processes.²⁷

Regarding the possibility for a radical break with a well-established canon of history, the chances seem to be better when the ruling national(ized) memory falls into disrepute, thereby opening the way before the rise of both a truly personal and specifically collective memory, which tends to replace the so far dominant role of the former. When this event is coupled with an apparent weakening of rigorous state censorship in terms of the “telling the truth of history,” the prospects for renewing the image of history through accommodating the individual and collective memorialization practices seem to be favorable.



It is hard to say whether by the 1970s the memory of the Holocaust was established as a fully legitimate *lieu de memoire* in Hungary. What is clear is that the events of the 1970s prepared the way for such a future development to take place over the subsequent decades. In addition, one has to be careful in not exaggerating the weight of the initial factors pointing in that direction. For example, *Sorstalanság* (Fatelessness), a fictional Holocaust narrative by Imre Kertész, winner of the 2002 Nobel Prize for literature, was published in 1975. Did it have an impact on the public’s memory of the Holocaust? As it happens, *Sorstalanság* did not receive any perceptible recognition and appreciation at the time of its publication, so it would

²⁷ The problem sketched here has been widely discussed in theoretical literature. For my own standpoint, see Gábor Gyáni, “Historical Event and Structure, and Their Relationship,” in *Signaturen des Geschehens. Ereignisse zwischen Öffentlichkeit und Latenz*, ed. Zoltán Kulcsár-Szabó and Csongor Lőrincz (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2014), 391–411.

seem not.²⁸ There are some other examples, however, that suggest that something was happening.

The documentary fiction *Hajtűkanyar* (Hairpin bend) (1974), written by Mária Ember, a publicist, succeeded in breaking the wall of the silence built around the Holocaust. Ember's narrative was a fusion of available historical documents with personal recollections (presumably that of the author), and the plainly fictional narrativization of ghettoization and deportation (not to Auschwitz, but to an Austrian work camp, Strasshof, close to Vienna). The novel provoked a swift reaction from a non-Jewish writer and essayist, György Száraz. His essay reacting to Ember's text was first published in a popular monthly, *Valóság*, and later in book form in a widely read book series, *Gyorsuló idő* (Accelerating time), from the publisher Magvető.²⁹ Száraz's essay provoked wide public interest and resulted in a breakthrough in the process of creating public discourse on the Holocaust. This may in part be explained by the raising of the question of Hungarian complicity in committing the Holocaust atrocities. No doubt, some official consent was also needed to publish this self-critical essay, and it shows indirectly the willingness of the Communist leadership to change the accustomed official attitude to the "Jewish question" and the memory of the Holocaust.

Száraz's argument demonstrated the firm intention of the author to face the past as represented by Ember's narrative. Even the motto that Száraz chose for his own text, taken from Ember's novel, showed what he aimed to express: "The object of this book is not 'the' fate of the Jews. What this book is about is the history of Hungary (Mária Ember, *Hajtűkanyar*)." Száraz commented on the statement the following way, "It is a subtle motto. But there lies a charge and a latent historical claim at the bottom of it. It does not request and does not demand: on the contrary, it announces. Rightfully."³⁰ He then puts the question to himself: How is one compelled to write about 1944? The answer to the question is that the

²⁸ The way Kertész's novel was received at that time has been thoroughly reconstructed and analyzed in György Vári, "A Kertész-életmű recepciótörténete" [A history of the reception of Imre Kertész's works], *BUKSZ (Budapesti Könyvszemle)* (Spring 1993): 31–41. Similar experiences are addressed by Anna Földes, "Emlékezés és felejtés" [Remembering and forgetting], *Élet és Irodalom*, August 22, 2014, 11.

²⁹ György Száraz, *Egy előítélet nyomában* [On the trace of a prejudice] (Valóság, 1975), 8, 60–82; György Száraz, *Egy előítélet nyomában* [On the trace of a prejudice] (Budapest: Magvető, 1976).

³⁰ Száraz, *Egy előítélet nyomában* (1976), 5.

story of that notable year has to be told in a way that reveals how it closely concerns every one of us, including the survivors, the bystanders, and the ones who were born later and those who would be born in the future. This is because the events that happened in that year have now truly become Hungarian history.

When Száraz refers to concrete passages in Ember's novel, he is interested in the textual manifestations of Jewish self-image (identity) and the image of wartime Hungarian society that contemporary Jews constructed for themselves. His primary aim is to bring them into close connection for the sake of identifying the then relevant Jewish and Hungarian (or, more precisely, Magyar, or gentile) identity constructs. Since Ember relies on a clearly Jewish viewpoint to relate the persecution and suffering of the Jews in Hungary, Száraz complements it with the distinct viewpoint of the perpetrator, or at least that of the bystander. As he is guided and deeply moved by Ember's Jewish-focused account both of the ghettoization and deportation of the countryside Hungarian Jewry, Száraz concludes that not even the gentiles exist beyond the constraints of the depressing historical experiences represented by the Holocaust. He is thus ready to admit the burden of culpability, and adopts a guilty conscience due to complicity in the sins committed against the Jewish citizens of the country.

Száraz thus provided the Hungarian Holocaust with a specific meaning by ascribing it a more general historical significance. He seems to anticipate in this way the later development of American and German (and international) Holocaust memorialization practice. It is quite another point to note that, not reducing the significance of his achievement, that only much later did a more permanent public interest in the Hungarian Holocaust emerge in Hungary, in the aftermath of the political shift of 1989.

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There are many obvious deficiencies in the process of coming to terms with the past. The case of the memory of the Holocaust in Hungary (as well as in neighboring countries, including, recently, Italy) is just one example.³¹ Such developments mean that it remains necessary to analyze

³¹ See, e.g., Fox, "The Holocaust under Communism"; Maciej Janowski, "Jedwabne, July 10, 1941: Debating the History of a Single Day"; Georgiy Kassianov, "The 'Nationalization' of History in Ukraine"; Diana Dumitru, "Caught between History and Politics: The Experience of a Moldavian Studying the Holocaust" (Janowski, Kassianov, and Dumitru were published in Alexei Miller and Maria

the intricate problem of reviving nationalisms today as well as to examine how history continues to be instrumentalized in diverse political contexts.

Let's summarize the case of Hungary.³² Two distinct traumatic experiences perform key functions in terms of creating and sustaining the national consciousness. The first is a collective memory manifesting itself in the Trianon syndrome, attached to the territorial and population losses the country suffered after World War I. Equally important is the second collective memory, manifesting itself in the wake of the trauma of the Holocaust. They are competing traumatic historical narratives, but the Trianon syndrome alone manages to monopolize and reserve for itself the national claim for the "true" traumatic past, expressed by the widely accepted view that it is "a question of national fate." The basis of reference has here been the very concept of the nation as an exclusive sacrificial community, which goes hand in hand with the conceptual relativization, and sometimes the outright negation, of the Jewish sacrificial community, at least in some particular collective memories, if not in the official (commemorative) Holocaust memory. The mutual absolutizing of the victim trauma and the absence of recognizing the perpetrator trauma,³³ prevents the Trianon syndrome and the Holocaust trauma from serving simultaneously as instances of equal importance in the national memory in the dominant collective mind. This seems to lie at the bottom of the contradictory developments of the Holocaust memory in today's Hungary.

Lipman, eds., *The Convolutions of Historical Politics* [Budapest: Central European University Press, 2012], 59–89, 141–74, 239–52); Richard J. Evans, "Kisses for the Duce!" *London Review of Books*, February 7, 2013; Christopher Duggan, "Coming to Terms with Italy's War," *History Today* 57 (December 2013): 72.

³² The argument advanced here is based on Gábor Gyáni: "The Memory of Trianon as a Political Instrument in Hungary Today," in *The Convolutions of Historical Politics*, ed. Alexei Miller and Maria Lipman (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2012), 91–115; and Gábor Gyáni, "Nemzet, kollektív emlékezet és public history" [Nation, collective memory and public history], *Történelmi Szemle* 56.3 (2012): 357–75.

³³ On the notion of "perpetrator trauma," see Bernhard Giesen, "The Trauma of Perpetrators: The Holocaust as the Traumatic Reference of German National Identity," in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 112–54. On the perpetrator problem more generally, see Dan Stone, *Histories of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 95–111.

Global and Local Holocaust Remembrance

Mónika Kovács

At the turn of the millennium, it appeared that the official Holocaust remembrance in Hungary would resemble the remembrance that was already institutionalized in Western Europe and in the United States. Schools have introduced a memorial day, and Hungary joined the international organization created to facilitate Holocaust commemoration and education.¹ The Holocaust Memorial Center in Budapest opened its permanent exhibition in 2005. This documented the Hungarian state's culpability in the Holocaust, a notion regularly reaffirmed by the speeches of state and government officials at various official memorial events.²

However, by the seventieth anniversary of the Hungarian Holocaust it became clear that, in addition to this institutionalized official memory, another way of remembrance surfaced as well. Since 2010 this narrative became official memory, too, when it began to receive governmental support. At the same time, this other official remembrance did not replace the previously institutionalized memory of the Holocaust, which, from time to time, is still endorsed by figures of the same government that sup-

¹ Originally called the International Task Force for Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research, it was later renamed to International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

² M. Kovács, "A holokauszt múlt feldolgozása: emlékezés vagy felejtés?" [Facing the Holocaust past: Remembrance or forgetting?], in *Nemzeti emlékhelyek. Attitűdök, reprezentációk, élmények, funkciók, struktúrák* [National lieu de mémoire: Attitudes, representations, experiences, functions, structures], ed. J. Kovács and Á. Münnich ([Debrecen]: Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó, 2012), 177–93.

ports the alternative approach. Consequently there are two parallel official sets of memories, and they cancel each other out. Below we will examine what social-psychological and memory policy-related causes lie behind the genesis of this dual official memory. Furthermore, we will examine the intergroup consequences of this duplication and the likelihood of appeasing of the two memories.

A Dual Official Memory of the Holocaust: Global and Local Holocaust Remembrance

At the start of the 1990s, Central European societies going through democratic transformation were faced with a Holocaust remembrance community which, as a result of a multidecade process, turned the reference to the Holocaust into a starting point for a desirable Western and even global human rights value systems and a universally held moral standard.³ The Holocaust became a global icon and a symbol of radical evil, and recognizing it as such appeared to Central European societies as a moral obligation and a condition for accession to Europe. Either freely or due to Western pressure, they realized that “if a nation actively participates in the community of Holocaust remembrance, its moral standing will improve at the international level”.⁴

Seemingly, the majority of post-Communist countries adopted global Holocaust remembrance without any problems. However, this attitude was often a symbolic, and sometimes pragmatic, gesture to emphasize their belonging to the West and not necessarily the expression of a wish to face their own past. Adhering to global Holocaust remembrance was easier than confronting the crimes committed by one’s own group or its indifference to genocide in former times. Many of the post-Communist countries have had recurring debates about the pasts of former politicians or intellectuals of varying significance. Due to their anti-Communist views or fiery national sentiments, they were meant to be reintroduced into the national pantheons and schoolbooks by different governmental actors or

³ A. Assmann, “A holokauszt—globális emlékezet? Egy új emlékezetközösség kiterjedtsége és korlátai” [The Holocaust—A global memory? Extensions and limits of a new memory community], in *Transznacionális politika és a holokauszt emlékezzettörténete* [Transnational politics and the history of Holocaust memory], ed. A. Szász and M. Zombory (Budapest: Befejezetlen Múlt Alapítvány, 2014), 167–84.

⁴ Assmann, “A holokauszt—globális emlékezet?”, 175.

strata of society. However, their antisemitic attitudes, their sympathy for Nazism, their activities during the Holocaust, and/or their shared responsibility made them untenable.⁵

In Hungary, the official rehabilitation of Horthy and the Horthy era began in the 1990s under Prime Minister József Antall.⁶ The issue of monuments and public spaces commemorating Horthy has been arising constantly. Recently, a heated debate erupted due to the introduction of works by Albert Wass and József Nyíró into the national curriculum. These debates are not unique to post-Communist countries, but similar confrontations in Western Europe usually do not lead to the acquittal of politicians or intellectuals with an embarrassing past. In fact, the exact opposite is more likely. Still, it is not difficult to find exceptions. For example, there were similar cases in Italy under Prime Minister Berlusconi.⁷

Global Holocaust remembrance often simplifies the story of the Holocaust into the mythical duel between good and evil, where the identities of victimized and perpetrating groups are irrelevant in terms of the story's universal "moral." A member of the global remembrance community, due to the internalization of the victim's story through movies, memoirs, or testimonies, can imagine him or herself in the position of the victim. Because of this, the survivor's story becomes the accepted story. Consequently, individuals are able to rid themselves of the heritage of their own perpetrating or tacit forebears, and of the story which was most likely not even known to them. The moral security of standing with the victim ("standing on the good side") leaves no urge for understanding the motives of perpetrators and bystanders. As a result, through the repetition of accounts of suffering, global Holocaust remembrance can become a substitute for critical self-evaluation,⁸ and it appears that it can also coexist

⁵ R. Robin-Maire, "Az emlékezet szétágazásai" [The bifurcation of memory], in *Transznacionális politika és a holokauszt emlékezetétörténete* [Transnational politics and the history of Holocaust memory], ed. A. Szász and M. Zombory (Budapest: Befejezetlen Múlt Alapítvány, 2014), 288–300.

⁶ I. Romsics, "Horthy Miklós emlékezete" [Memory of Miklós Horthy], in *Történelem és emlékezet. Egy akadémiai ülészak előadásai* [History and remembrance: Lectures of an academic session], ed. G. Hunyady and L. Török (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 2014), 110–23.

⁷ See G. Gyáni, "A történelem jelentése és politikai haszna" [The meaning of history and its political utility], in *Történelem és emlékezet. Egy akadémiai ülészak előadásai* [History and remembrance: Lectures of an academic session], ed. G. Hunyady and L. Török (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 2014), 58–73.

⁸ Assmann, "A holokauszt—globális emlékezet?"

with the absence of confronting the past of one's own group, especially the past of one's own family members.

Precisely because of the sufficiently learned Holocaust lesson, the descendants of perpetrators and bystanders cannot even imagine that some in their family were Nazis or collaborators, even if they have heard the family member in question affirm this. In their imaginations, the onetime perpetrators are stylized into mavericks or even into rescuers, as proven by the researches of Welzer and his colleagues in Germany.⁹ According to their 2002 representative survey, only 6% of the German population thought that their predecessors nurtured positive or very positive attitudes in connection with the Nazis. On the other hand 26% believed that their ancestors helped the persecuted.¹⁰ According to Welzer, "the traditional, but seemingly long-surpassed theory, according to which the 'Nazis' and the 'Germans' were two different groups is experiencing a renaissance. The individual removes his forebears from historical knowledge, thus the 'evil' of National Socialist rule and the 'benevolence' of grandparents and great-grandparents can coexist comfortably."¹¹

However, the conclusions of research which focused on German collective memory do not necessarily indicate that exploration and education of the Holocaust are unnecessary just because they result in an erroneous perception of one's predecessors. Grandchildren and great-grandchildren "falsify" the pasts of their forefathers precisely because they realize the consequences of antisemitism, racism, Nazi ideology, and passivity. They have learned that after the Holocaust there is no innocent antisemitism, racism, or indifference toward the fate of our fellow human beings. "The majority of grandchildren hold anti-National Socialist ideals."¹² This ideal is exactly the opposite of the above-mentioned efforts which try to deny or to justify the behavior of persons ideologically or politically responsible for the Holocaust. As such, the examined third and fourth generation Germans do not *deny*, but, due to moral reasons, *reject*¹³ the past of

⁹ H. Welzer, S. Moller, and K. Tschuggnall, "Értelmezések—hogyan változnak a történetek a generációk során? [Understandings: How stories change through passing from one generation to the other], in *Holokauszt: történelem és emlékezet* [Holocaust: History and memory], ed. M. Kovács (Budapest: HAE-Jaffa, 2005), 365–85.

¹⁰ H. Welzer, *Grandpa Wasn't a Nazi: The Holocaust in German Family Remembrance* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 2005).

¹¹ Welzer, Moller, and Tschuggnall, "Értelmezések," 384.

¹² *Ibid.*, 384.

¹³ The italics are not mine.

their own group.¹⁴ This type of collective memory comes *after* confrontation of the group's past, while the absence of self-evaluation which causes dual remembrance is a characteristic of an effort to adhere to the norms of global Holocaust remembrance without understanding the lessons that can only be internalized by facing the acts of the perpetrators and bystanders of one's own group, though not necessarily the acts of one's own family members.

Post-Communist societies which wished to join the global Holocaust remembrance community had to realize that their own injuries inflicted during Soviet occupation were not only overlooked by the international community vis-à-vis focusing on the trauma of the Jewish minority, but that they were also expected to adopt the "German model" of facing the Holocaust past and conduct a thorough self-examination due to complicity in a genocide. Within this "model" the Holocaust has become mythologized and its moral weight has grown enormously during the decades since its execution. The *local* official remembrance seems to offer a temporary way out of this necessitation. If the majority is also simply a victim, then its own freedom to act in the past along with its subsequent responsibility today are both limited. This is how *official global Holocaust remembrance* (which is adopted mainly because of pragmatic reasons and voiced during memorial engagements) and *official local Holocaust remembrance* (which aims to avoid introspection while it either explicitly denies or finds excuses for the crimes of the perpetrating group) can be allowed to coexist.

In Hungary, the local version of history was first institutionalized when the permanent exhibit at the House of Terror opened in 2002. The exhibition suggested that Hungary became a *victim* of foreign powers first during the German, and then again during the Soviet occupation. The organizers introduced the new term "double occupation" in this exhibition. As a result, questions of Hungary's responsibility during the Hungarian Holocaust and the ensuing Soviet-style dictatorship did not need to be examined.¹⁵ This approach became one of the official remembrances after 2010, when the new Fundamental Law of 2011 recorded a provision

¹⁴ G. Hunyady, "Visszatekintés a jelenből" [Looking back from the present], in *Történelem és emlékezet. Egy akadémiai ülészak előadásai* [History and remembrance: Lectures of an academic session], ed. G. Hunyady and L. Török (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 2014), 9–25.

¹⁵ This, by the way, is contradicted by the exhibit itself, since it names specific Hungarians as responsible for Soviet-style dictatorship.

stating that “[w]e date the restoration of our country’s self-determination, lost on the nineteenth day of March 1944, from the second day of May 1990, when the first freely elected organ of popular representation was formed.”¹⁶ This view was expressed symbolically in the so called “German occupation memorial” announced in January 2014.¹⁷

The memorial’s concept was received with immediate resistance. Survivors and their descendants, the general public opinion, those voicing their opinions in the media of both political sides, and the Philosophy and Historical Sciences section of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences expressed unequivocal discontent. Academic György Hunyady wrote that “[t]he memorial ... commemorating the German occupation ... aims to forget and make others forget the culpability of Hungarian society and the Horthy administration in the persecution and loss of the masses who were marked as Jews and the long-term ... cooperation with German fascism.”¹⁸ The memorial was erected despite the controversy, while the protesters established their own memorial shrine, the so-called Living Memorial. At the moment there are two conflicting memorials facing each other in one of the main public spaces of Budapest. One is a statue that has been constructed, but not inaugurated, by the government. Its message, set in stone and bronze, offers a mutual sense of victimhood for the descendants of victims, perpetrators, and bystanders, while it deflects all accountability to the German occupiers.¹⁹ The other memorial, the contents of which change every day, is where mostly the victims’ descendants place objects—stones, writings, photos—symbolizing their rejection of the official memorial.²⁰ A similar conflict of memories has occurred concerning the House of Fates project, an exhibition currently being prepared under the aegis of the House of Terror.

¹⁶ The quote is from the Hungarian Fundamental Law’s “National Avowal.”

¹⁷ Hunyady, “Visszatekintés a jelenből.”

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ E. Marosi, “Derűre ború? Művészettörténeti megjegyzések” [After a calm comes a storm? History of art notes], in *Történelem és emlékezet. Egy akadémiai ülészak előadásai* [History and remembrance: Lectures of an academic session], ed. G. Hunyady and L. Török (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 2014), 74–88.

²⁰ A. Assmann, “Zwei leere Stühle, die sich gegenüberstehen,” *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, December 18, 2014, <http://www.nzz.ch/feuilleton/zwei-leere-stuehle-die-sich-gegenueberstehen-1.18446566>.

The phenomenon of “competitive victimhood”²¹ often manifests itself in symmetric group conflicts, when both parties place their own victimhood in the forefront vis-à-vis the other group, thus trying to minimize the crimes against the other group and justify the “legitimacy” of their own aggression. This strategy characteristically leads to the continuation of the conflict, even in the long term. In the case of an asymmetric conflict, the refusal to recognize the victimhood of a group which suffered genocide, transferring the blame to a third party, and the resulting palliation of the perpetrators cause the secondary traumatization of victims and their descendants.²² At the same time, it makes long-term reconciliation between the groups impossible, and it cements the onetime asymmetric group conflict into a conflict of memory policy. Additionally, it forces a fraudulent version of history on society as an official version of events, which is not only discordant with the collective memory of victims but also with historical accounts presented by historians. According to Gyáni, “this does not only create—rightful—unease because it lends a false and distorted image to the past, but also because it expresses political delusion.”²³

Motivations of Competitive Victimhood

Research on auto-stereotypes shows that groups are not only motivated to compete with other groups to obtain positive distinction, but they are especially sensitive to maintaining a moral high ground.²⁴ We compare our own group with others according to three dimensions: competence (success, prestige), warm-heartedness and sociability (friendly, helpful), and morality (honesty, reliability). Morality is more important when evaluating our own group than the other two dimensions. According to Campbell and his colleagues²⁵ this is the dimension that ethnic groups

²¹ M. Noor, N. Shnabel, S. Halabi, and A. Nadler, “When Suffering Begets Suffering: The Psychology of Competitive Victimhood Between Adversarial Groups in Violent Conflicts,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 16.4 (2012): 351–74.

²² See J. Herman-Lewis, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992). Marosi, “Derűre ború?”

²³ Gyáni, “A történelem jelentése és politikai haszna,” 69.

²⁴ C. W. Leach, N. Ellemers, and M. Barreto, “Group Virtue: The Importance of Morality (vs. Competence and Sociability) in the Positive Evaluation of In-Groups,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 93.2 (2007): 234–49.

²⁵ Quoted in *ibid.*

examined by them were consistently more likely to award to themselves over others. Thus, groups will be most competitive concerning assumed morality. Individuals tend to identify more with groups they perceive as superior in terms of morality. Simultaneously, the more one identifies with a group, the more motivated one will be to see that group as morally superior to others.²⁶

The shadow of crimes committed by former members of the group threatens precisely that carefully guarded moral self-image. Furthermore, it places the victimized group into a better moral position when compared with the descendants of the perpetrators.²⁷ In order to divert the identity threat they commonly employ techniques like the denial of responsibility, blaming a third group, and emphasizing the variability of their own group.²⁸ Another strategy includes a group highlighting its own victimhood, what Noor and his coworkers called “competitive victimhood.”²⁹ This exercise is accompanied by decreased empathy toward the suffering of other groups and an increased tendency to underestimate the gravity of the crimes committed by the individual’s own group.³⁰

Characteristically, the details of the sufferings of the in-group are better preserved in the collective memory than the hurts and losses that have been caused by the group itself. The collective memories of two groups about the same conflict cause and conserve different representations that are in harmony with presenting their own groups as victims and ensure a better moral position for themselves when compared to the other group. While in cases of asymmetric conflict, the persecuted group preserves the traumatic memory, and that in turn often becomes a central element of the group’s identity,³¹ the perpetrators and their descendants “remember” less and less with each generation about the losses and hurts

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Noor, Shnabel, Halabi, and Nadler, “When Suffering Begets Suffering.”

²⁸ J. R. Vollhardt and M. Bilewicz, “After the Genocide: Psychological Perspectives on Victim, Bystander, and Perpetrator Groups,” *Journal of Social Issues* 69.1 (2013): 1–15.

²⁹ Noor, Shnabel, Halabi, and Nadler, “When Suffering Begets Suffering.”

³⁰ M. Bilewicz and A. Stefaniak, “Can a Victim Be Responsible? Anti-Semitic Consequences of Victimhood-Based Identity and Competitive Victimhood in Poland,” in *Responsibility: A Cross-Disciplinary Perspective*, ed. B. Bokus (Studio Lexem, 2013), 69–77.

³¹ V. D. Volkan, “Unending Mourning and Its Consequences,” *Psychotherapie-Wissenschaft* 1.2 (2011): 102–10.

of the other group's members. They will even treat the event itself as more temporally distant.³²

The motivation directed toward the protection of a group's own moral integrity does not only encourage the denial of a past filled with a sense of collective guilt and shame, but it also cultivates negative attitudes toward the victims. In terms of the Holocaust, the relevant phenomena are secondary antisemitism and victim blaming. Imhoff and Banse examined how German study participants' attitudes were altered when they read about how the trauma of the Holocaust still casts a shadow over the lives of Jewish survivors and their family members.³³ According to their results, those who have read about the prolonged impact of the Holocaust were more likely to have implicit negative attitudes toward Jews than those who read "only" about the suffering experienced by Jews during the Holocaust. The authors highlighted that a large number of subjects had to be left out of the experiment, because they did not remember the part of the text that referred to the Holocaust's lasting effect. This unexpected result shows the strength of the psychological defense which rejects confronting a group's own negative past.³⁴

Post-Holocaust antisemitism charges Jews with exploiting the guilt felt by other peoples and caused by the Holocaust. This is how many people justify their refusal to deal with past crimes committed against Jews.³⁵ According to research done with representative samples, over half of those surveyed in Poland tended to lean toward partial or strong agreement with these types of statements.³⁶ Almost half (45%) of those surveyed in Hungary agreed with the statement that "Jews even try to gain advantage from their own persecution," while two-thirds (65%) thought that "Non-Jewish Hungarians suffered just as much as Jews during the

³² J. Peetz, G. R. Gunn, and A. E. Wilson, "Crimes of the Past: Defensive Temporal Distancing in the Face of Past In-Group Wrongdoing," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 36.5 (2010): 598–611.

³³ R. Imhoff and R. Banse, "Ongoing Victim Suffering Increases Prejudice: The Case of Secondary Anti-Semitism," *Psychological Science* 20 (2009): 1443–47.

³⁴ Ibid.; M. Kovács, "A német múltfeldolgozás és tanulságai" [Facing the past in Germany: some edifications], in *Egyezzünk ki a múlttal! Műhelybeszélgetések történelmi mítoszainkról, tévhiteinkről* [Let's come to terms with the past! Workshop conversations about our historical legends and delusions], ed. L. Lőrinc (Budapest: Történelemtanárok Egylete, 2010), 136–42.

³⁵ M. Bilewicz, M. Winiewski, M. Kofta, A. Wójcik, A., "Harmful Ideas, the Structure and Consequences of Anti-Semitic Beliefs in Poland," *Political Psychology* 34.6 (2013): 821–39.

³⁶ Ibid., 9

war.” Over half (58%) believed that “after all these years, the topic of the Holocaust should be laid to rest.”³⁷ It seems that secondary antisemitism identified in Germany and Poland may also play a role in defining negative attitudes toward Jews in Hungary.

According to the results published by the Polish researchers, the more one identifies with his own national group, the more inclined one is to think that Poles were persecuted with greater regularity than other peoples and are thus morally superior (absolute victimhood). On the other hand, when a person is more prone to hold that Poles have suffered as much as Jews (relative victimhood), his attitudes toward Jews tend to be more negative, and he is more likely to accept conspiracy theories about Jews. Thus the authors believe that in addition to animosity toward the group that creates feelings of guilt—secondary antisemitism—there are two further causes for post-Holocaust antisemitism. One of these is absolute victimhood, through which the given group almost feels justified in having negative attitudes and feelings of distrust toward other groups, including Jews. The other is relative victimhood, where the group views Jews as competitors in victimhood and thus harbors prejudices against them.³⁸

Confronting people with instances of aggression which their own group committed against the members of another group often leads to the perceptions of the victims as less human and less similar to the members of the in-group. This manifests itself in a decreased tendency to endow the victim group with so-called secondary emotions that characterize only humans as well as to withhold creativity and sophisticated intellect from them.³⁹ Kofta and Slawuta compared how surveyed Poles’ attitudes changed toward Israeli Jews after they read about the 1946 pogrom in Kielce.⁴⁰ Compared to the control group, who were not reminded of the pogrom perpetrated by Poles, the group who read about the pogrom was less interested in Jewish traditions and meeting Israeli Jews. They were also less enthusiastic about restitutions to Jews and were more likely to accept conspiracy theories about

³⁷ A. Kovács, “Az antiszemita nyelv legitimé vált a közbeszédben” [The anti-Semitic language became legitimate in public discourse], Szombat, January 4, 2012, <http://www.szombat.org/politika/4338-az-antiszemita-nyelv-legitimé-vált-a-kozbeszedben>.

³⁸ Bilewicz and Stefaniak, “Can a Victim Be Responsible?”

³⁹ Castano & Giner-Sorolla (2006), quoted in M. Kofta and P. Slawuta, “Thou Shall Not Kill ... Your Brother: Victim–Perpetrator Cultural Closeness and Moral Disapproval of Polish Atrocities against Jews after the Holocaust,” *Journal of Social Issues* 69.1 (2013): 54–73.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Jews. This comes to show that they were more likely to see Jews as a dangerous out-group after reading about their own group's crimes against Jews than the control group, which did not read such text.

The motivation to protect their own group could only be prevented, as it was the case of the third group, by making them read a—fictional—passage that stated that Israeli Jews and Poles display many cultural similarities prior to reading about the pogrom. When cultural proximity was brought into play, not only did it increase the sense of collective guilt in Poles, but it also resulted in an increased perception of humanity endowing higher sensitivity to Jews. The third group assigned all emotions to Jews to a greater degree than the other two groups. The authors proposed that a sense of cultural similarity helped integrate Israeli Jews into the moral universe of Poles. That in turn increased sentiments of collective guilt felt over the group's mistreatment of Jews, empathy toward them, and a more pronounced assignment of emotions to them. The group that read only about the pogrom committed by Poles employed a psychological defense differentiating their own group from the victims and that led to dehumanization. The authors called attention to the notion that it is likely that at the baseline all groups are likely to exhibit defensive reactions.⁴¹

When repeating the experiment, they also asked the respondents about the perceived credibility of the text detailing the pogrom. Those that received just this text believed it to be less credible than the group that also read about cultural similarities. The less they thought the pogrom's description to be authentic, the less they reported feelings of collective guilt. Collective guilt is especially important because it encourages regaining the group's moral stand through apology and the making of amends, which, if received favorably by the persecuted group, could lead to reconciliation.⁴²

With the passage of time, the two groups' perceptions of trauma, though they were already different upon its occurrence,⁴³ will grow more

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ A. Assmann, "Persönliche Erinnerung und kollektives Gedächtnis in Deutschland nach 1945," in *Eriennen und Verstehen. Der Völkermord an den Juden im politischen Gedächtnis der Deutschen*, ed. H. Erler (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 2003), 126–38; R. Baumeister, "The Holocaust and the Four Roots of Evil," in *Understanding Genocide: The Social Psychology of the Holocaust*, ed. L. S. Newman and R. Erber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 241–58; K. Gebert, "Conflicting Memories: Polish and Jewish Perceptions of the Shoah," in *Holocaust Education in a Global Context*, ed. K. Fracapane and M. Hass (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2014), 28–39.

distant. In the eyes of the victim group, the trauma will increasingly become the mythological archetype of victimhood that simultaneously expresses the group's cohesion and provides a positive moral position when compared to the out-group. For the descendants of those who committed the crime, the event will remain a source of guilt and a threat to group identity. Its memory will fade through the generations and eventually disappear. While on the one hand the more one identifies with the victimized group, the more one will be attached to the trauma,⁴⁴ on the other hand the more one identifies with the onetime group of persecutors, the more likely it is that one will deflect commemoration and will refuse to adopt the story of the victims. The increasingly differing views formed about asymmetric violence will result in a constantly amplifying conflict between the two groups, though quite paradoxically the event becomes more and more distant in time and affectedness becomes more leveraged in both groups.⁴⁵

Confessing to the Past and the Chance of Reconciliation

Holocaust remembrance utilized as a universal norm outgrew the societies it affected, descendants of perpetrators, bystander and victims alike. Due to the global memory of the Holocaust, the memory of victims' descendants is increasingly assimilated into global Holocaust remembrance. This causes the individual to become part of the "super trauma" through belonging to the victim group and in addition to the traumatic family experience. Next to this trauma, all personal and social shocks are reduced,⁴⁶ and a chance for forgiveness or reconciliation is difficult to imagine. The progenies of victims may feel that this exceptional genocide must never be forgotten, because its eternal memory creates a foundation for a moral standard which provides protection not only for Jews but to all minority groups in case the majority reexperiences aberration. This may be expressed by the norm of "remembering to never forget."⁴⁷ The lack of reconciliation between the two groups however may pose a psychological

⁴⁴ R. P. Brown, M. J. Wohl, and J. J. Exline, "Taking Up Offenses: Secondhand Forgiveness and Group Identification," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 34.10 (2008): 1406–19.

⁴⁵ Volkan, "Unending Mourning and Its Consequences."

⁴⁶ Assmann, "A holokausz—globális emlékezet?" 184.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 183.

hurdle for the majority group that will block the road not only to reconciliation but also to global Holocaust remembrance and its universal “moral.”

According to Shnabel and Nadler’s 2008 model, confronting the past threatens the varying psychological needs of the descendants of onetime perpetrators and bystanders on the one hand, and of victims on the other.⁴⁸ The most important need for the descendants of victims is for control, since their forebears lost control over their own situation and security. The descendants of onetime perpetrators and bystanders will attempt to salvage their moral position damaged by the complicity. The model was tested on Israelis and Germans. The former group received a—fictional—text where a member of the other group praised the achievements and contributions to Western society of his group (satisfaction of the need for control). The latter group got a passage which spoke about how difficult it is for the other group to live with such a taxing past (satisfaction of need for acceptance). Israeli subjects proved to be more prepared to reconcile with Germans after hearing the praise of Jewish accomplishments, while Germans were more inclined to reconcile with Israelis after reading the sympathetic Israeli text.⁴⁹

The staircase model of reconciliation supposes that gestures of apology and amends by the onetime perpetrators and bystanders endow the group of victims with a sense of control that satisfies their desire for security. Through forgiveness and acceptance, the perpetrating group’s desire for moral acceptance is fulfilled. According to the model, after several turns of apologizing and forgiving the two groups can turn the page on the past and reconcile with each other. This is why truth and reconciliation commissions were established after the Rwandan genocide and the abolishment of South African apartheid, where confessing and regretting crimes enabled steps toward reconciliation—that is to say, memory served as a foundation for reconciliation, and, with the agreement of the victims, to closing and “forgetting” the past.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ N. Shnabel and A. Nadler, “A Needs-Based Model of Reconciliation: Satisfying the Differential Emotional Needs of Victim and Perpetrator as a Key to Promoting Reconciliation,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 94.1 (2008): 116–32.

⁴⁹ N. Shnabel, A. Nadler, J. Ullrich, J. F. Dovidio, and D. Carmi, “Promoting Reconciliation Through the Satisfaction of the Emotional Needs of Victimized and Perpetrating Group Members: The Needs-Based Model of Reconciliation,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 35.8 (2009): 1021–30.

⁵⁰ A. Assmann, “From Collective Violence to a Common Future: Four Models for Dealing with a Traumatic Past,” in *Justice and Memory. Confronting Traumatic Pasts: An International Comparison*, ed. R. Wodak and G. A. Borea (Wien: Passagen Verlag, 2009), 31–48.

Research conducted after meetings between Polish and Israeli student groups showed as well that these encounters proved to affect participants' attitudes toward each other much more positively when the meetings focused on the present and commonalities instead of the past. It was also documented that Polish students felt anxious and threatened before meeting their Israeli counterparts, because they were afraid that Israeli students would hold them responsible for assumed Polish passivity during the Holocaust.⁵¹ The authors suggest that if dealing with the past allows a more detailed picture of the other group, it can serve as a starting point for surpassing a black and white perpetrator/victim template. This may decrease anxiety for descendants of perpetrators and bystanders when they meet the members of the former victim group. This was achieved by allowing participants to familiarize themselves with stories of those Poles that helped the persecuted population and not just with stories of perpetrators and bystanders.

The researchers examined whether the integration of stories about rescuers had a positive effect on the attitudes of Israeli and Polish students toward each other. During a group exercise they dealt with four rescue stories from various countries, one of which was from Poland. Afterward they had a conversation with a rescuer as well. Their task was to discuss the motivations of the rescuers. Contrary to previous experiences where focusing on the past had a negative effect on Polish students' attitudes toward their Israeli peers, the group project with rescuers improved their outlook, and they viewed Israeli pupils as more similar to themselves. After discussing rescue efforts, Polish students felt that Israelis were more accepting of their group, so dealing with the past did not threaten their group identity. However, there was no such positive change in the attitudes of Israeli students. The victims' (supposed) need for control was not fulfilled by engaging this topic. Nonetheless, after the group discussion on rescuers they viewed the members of the other group as more similar to themselves as well.⁵²

Changes in the attitudes displayed by Israeli students toward the Polish group may have been caused by the fact that the rescuers' stories stressed the general human level of persecution and rescue efforts. Simi-

⁵¹ M. Bilewicz and M. Jaworska, "Reconciliation through the Righteous: The Narratives of Heroic Helpers as a Fulfillment of Emotional Needs in Polish-Jewish Intergroup Contact," *Journal of Social Issues* 69.1 (2013): 162-79.

⁵² Ibid.

larly, Wohl and Branscombe evaluated American Jewish university students' attitudes toward present-day Germans.⁵³ Their findings indicate that the Jewish students expected a lot less guilt from modern Germans, believed them to be more similar to themselves, and were more likely to forgive them if they read a text about the Holocaust which introduced the topic as a universal crime against humanity, instead of telling the same story as a German campaign against Jews. Human-level categorization encouraged Jewish students to distinguish people living today—including themselves and present-day Germans—from the perpetrators of the past: the Nazis. Because of this they saw themselves to be closer to present-day Germans and found greater similarity between Jews and Germans. They were more open to interaction with Germans, purchasing German cars, traveling to Germany, and learning the German language than those who employed the perpetrator–victim (German–Jewish) categorization.⁵⁴

Additionally, there will be differing consequences for the guilt and regret felt in connection with the group's prior behavior. Guilt is a stronger emotion that is directed toward one's own group and motivates to rid oneself of feeling it. In positive cases it is aimed at the appeasement of the victim, but in negative cases it may lead to justifying past violence. On the other hand, regret is a much more subtle sentiment, is directed toward the other group where it increases empathy, positive attitudes, and willingness for contact. Depending on whether the Holocaust was presented from the perpetrators' or victims' point of view, German subjects experienced differing collective emotions. In both cases, they were more likely to report regret than guilt. The perpetrators' perspective (how German soldiers participated in the deportation and murder of Jews) led to more collective guilt, while the victims' viewpoint (what Jewish victims experienced) resulted in more collective regret. Collective guilt was a greater motivational force for the approval of reparations, but it also increased aversion to Jews: German students thought meeting a Jewish survivor to be more uncomfortable and they were less inclined to befriend Jews.⁵⁵

⁵³ M. J. Wohl and N. R. Branscombe, "Forgiveness and Collective Guilt Assignment to Historical Perpetrator Groups Depend on Level of Social Category Inclusiveness," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 88.2 (2005): 288–303.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ R. Imhoff, M. Bilewicz, and H. P. Erb, "Collective Regret Versus Collective Guilt: Different Emotional Reactions to Historical Atrocities," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 42.6 (2012): 729–42.

According to the model of reconciliation, the varying needs of both perpetrators and bystanders on the one hand, and victims on the other must be met for the process to be fulfilling for both groups. This can be a very difficult course when it comes to asymmetric group violence. As we have seen with the Polish example, we can decrease the anxiety of the group of onetime perpetrators and bystanders by introducing examples of exceptional people who worked to protect and rescue the members of the persecuted population from the hands of their murderers. But the one-sided mention of rescuers might only contribute to the avoidance of confronting the past and may result in neglect of recognition, apology, and redress necessary for reconciliation.⁵⁶ Denying the specifics of genocide and highlighting the fact that genocides are part of human history may result in the victims' getting the impression that the Holocaust was relativized and that their own tragedy was not recognized.⁵⁷

For the process of reconciliation to start, it is essential that the two groups establish trust. Without this, both groups will have greater motivation to maintain victim identities, to deflect responsibility to a third party, or emphasize their own victimhood. We can only say that reconciliation takes place if the descendants of the victims forgive the crimes committed against their family members, and the descendants of the perpetrators and bystanders feel that their moral standing is no longer threatened. In this scenario, the two groups may be able to surpass the conflict, develop a common group identity, and abandon competition.

A vision of a common future aids reconciliation, while intergroup competition, which is present outside of memory policy as well, makes that goal impossible to achieve. Efforts toward reconciliation carry risks for both groups. Perpetrators' descendants make themselves vulnerable in terms of their moral assessment by the other group, because if forgiveness is not provided they will not be released from the moral stigma affecting the group. The risk undertaken by the victims' descendants is that choosing reconciliation may divorce them from their "chosen trauma," which, especially in cases of genocide, can be a central element of group identity. Surrendering victimhood also results in giving up the derivative moral superiority.

⁵⁶ Bilewicz and Jaworska, "Reconciliation through the Righteous."

⁵⁷ Wohl and Branscombe, "Forgiveness and Collective Guilt Assignment."

Holocaust Education and Making Peace with the Past

Reconciliation is not only conditioned on agreement on the past, but also on the creation of a societal value system which is acceptable for onetime victims, perpetrators, bystanders and rescuers, and which will respect the equality and human rights of all those involved. The only sensible reason to adopt global Holocaust remembrance is if remembrance is “utilized” the same way as it was in Western countries: as a negative reference point for a common human rights value system. Post-Communist Holocaust memory is not only struggling because majority groups deflect facing the crimes of the past, but also because they do not feel that the post-Holocaust Western value system is their own.

Before the democratic transition, Hungarian schools did not highlight the Holocaust and avoided identifying the victims as Jews, although the system tried to gain legitimacy through antifascism. They did not emphasize the Holocaust, but the condemnation of Nazism was obvious. Perhaps this is why my research shows that those who went to school before the democratic transition knew more about the Holocaust than those who attended educational institutions after 1989.⁵⁸ It seems that the moral framework into which Holocaust-related facts could be inserted was present at one point, and this facilitated the memorization of acquired information.

The constant reforms of the curriculum in the past two and a half decades since the collapse of the Communist system did not bring upon a consensus on values. No thought was given as to what types of schools were needed to raise responsible and autonomous citizens. Referring to the spirit of Adorno’s *Education after Auschwitz*, we need to ask: What should education be like after Auschwitz and the Gulag? Adorno thought that education must turn into sociology and the motives and behaviors of the perpetrators and bystanders have to be examined in the classroom alongside analyses of those resisting and rescuing.⁵⁹ The antisemitic wave at the end of the 1950s in Germany resulted in widespread public debate.

⁵⁸ M. Kovács, “Kollektív emlékezet, társadalmi identitás és a holokauszoktatása” [Collective memory, social identity and Holocaust education], in *Zsidóság—tradícionális és modernitás* [Jewry: Tradition and modernity], ed. Z. H. Bíró and P. T. Nagy (Budapest: Wesley János Lelkészképző Főiskola, 2012), 419–34.

⁵⁹ T. W. Adorno, “Education after Auschwitz,” in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 191–204.

As a result, the National Socialist system was featured more prominently in historical and civic education, and Holocaust education was gradually institutionalized in the coming decades.⁶⁰ The German curriculum, exhibitions, and educational programs focus on motifs of perpetrators, bystanders, and rescuers. They examine the ideology and operation of the totalitarian system, too.

Paradoxically, it is precisely the examination of the whole society of the Holocaust⁶¹ that provides us with not only the opportunity to understand the difference between democracy and authoritarianism and thus to strengthen commitment to democracy, but it also allows the descendants of the perpetrators and bystanders to become part of a joint evaluation of the Holocaust and, consequently of Holocaust remembrance together with the descendants of the victims. This aids us in understanding why different people did become perpetrators, bystanders or—on the contrary—rescuers. Different actors are presented as individuals. This illuminates the fact that the majority was not homogenous and that different ideologies caused them to act one way or another. While the stories of victims may provide us with increased empathy, only an understanding of the other groups and the ideologies which affected them can allow us to grasp the society which created the Holocaust⁶² and offer insight into other genocides.⁶³ For instance, Rwanda and South Africa examined and taught the Holocaust in order to understand their own genocide as well as the apartheid system, and to transfer their lessons to the next generation.⁶⁴

Thinking about historical and contemporary social processes can dissolve seemingly impenetrable boundaries in collective memory by ensuring

⁶⁰ M. Heyl, "Nevelés Auschwitzról, Auschwitz után. Az oktatás változzék szociológiává" [Education about Auschwitz, after Auschwitz: Education should become sociology], in *Holokausztoktatás és autonómiára nevelés* [Holocaust education and promoting autonomy], ed. M. Kovács (Budapest: HAE, 2001), 43–62.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² W. Kaiser, "Teaching about Perpetrators of the Holocaust in Germany," in *Holocaust Education in a Global Context*, ed. K. Fracapane and M. Hass (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2014), 20–27.

⁶³ P. Salmons and M. Hass, "Comparing Genocide in the Classroom: Challenges and Opportunities," in *Holocaust Education in a Global Context*, ed. K. Fracapane and M. Hass (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2014), 101–11.

⁶⁴ F. Masabo, "Educating about the History of Genocides in Rwanda," in *Holocaust Education in a Global Context*, ed. K. Fracapane and M. Hass (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2014), 129–34; R. Freedman, "Engaging with Holocaust Education in Post-Apartheid South Africa," in *Holocaust Education in a Global Context*, ed. K. Fracapane and M. Hass (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2014), 134–42.

that we understand mutual responsibility to be the creation of a society which ensures the inalienable rights of all people regardless of our own and others' group identity.⁶⁵ Holocaust education can create the decategorization necessary to reduce intergroup animosity,⁶⁶ because if we look at our human commonality with perpetrators, bystanders, and rescuers we can reduce the motivation for competitive victimhood. The past can only be divorced from the present if a society once divided into perpetrators, bystanders, rescuers, and victims can think of itself as belonging to the same category once again. Group-based guilt and shame are not necessary conditions for the internalization of the global "Holocaust lesson." This is why the lesson can be called global: because anyone can identify with it, as long as the Holocaust is defined as a paradigmatic example of a crime against humanity.

Conclusion

While global Holocaust remembrance may sustain the standard of "remembering to never forget," local Holocaust memory has to aim for reconciliation. The latter means the admission and regret of the crime along with its subsequent forgiving and forgetting. In processing the past, victims and other groups have different psychological needs. While preserving a conflict of memory policy may appear to be in the short-term interest of one group or another, in the long run it poisons the values and human relationships within a society. Reconciliation requires the satisfaction of the psychological needs of both groups, the restoration of trust, and cooperation on how to represent the past. Mutual remembrance will include not only the stories of perpetrators, bystanders, and victims, but also the realization that these stories will never be the same since they were preserved from different perspectives.

The current dual official memory makes reconciliation impossible because it suggests to the descendants of survivors that the past was not

⁶⁵ M. Kovács, "Holocaust Education and Remembrance," in *The Holocaust in Hungary: A European Perspective*, ed. J. Molnár (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2005), 723–39.

⁶⁶ See M. Kovács, "Az előítéletek okai és mérséklésük lehetőségei: a szociálpszichológiai nézőpont" [The roots of prejudice and the prospects for prejudice reduction: The social-psychological approach], *Alkalmazott Pszichológia* 12.1–2 (2010): 7–27.

confronted. As a result, more and more generations of victims' descendants will make solidarity with the trauma of their ancestors a central point of their group identity. Since a mode of collective remembrance that contains admission and forgiveness and is mutually accepted together with the majority is never formed, the group boundaries created by genocide will be retained and can easily become central themes in political games. Supplementing global Holocaust commemoration with the processing of local memory and the consequent reconciliation could create a Holocaust remembrance that could transfer the "Holocaust lesson" equally well to the descendants of both victims and perpetrators. Through this, an increased dedication to democracy and human rights could be ensured, and we could also foster greater trust in each other.

Digitalized Memories of the Holocaust in Hungary in the Visual History Archive

Andrea Pető

This chapter is a contribution to a little analyzed aspect of Holocaust scholarship: the intersection of people's tribunals (post–World War II legal institutions), survivor testimonies, and digital accessibility. The aim is to highlight the complexities of memorialization using one case study: the Visual History Archive of the Shoah Foundation at the University of Southern California; and one subject: the experiences of Shoah survivors during the post-1945 trials in Hungary. I am focusing on Jewish survivors in Hungary as agents of commemoration of their own stories.

Among historians there are two foundational assumptions about the retributive court procedures' relation to the Shoah's post–WWII history. One of them is by Bloxham: "Jewish survivors, indeed survivors in general, were incapable of *illuminating the general picture* because of a prosecution strategy that favored documents above fragile memory."¹ Namely, there has been no possibility for Jewish survivors to give a testimony about their experiences until the Eichmann trial. The second assumption concerns the periodization of Holocaust memory, lumping together into one homogeneous time frame the entire period before the Eichmann trial—and in the case of the Soviet-occupied countries, the period until 1989—and arguing that survivors' stories have not been heard throughout this time. In this chapter first I will discuss the specificities of the Hungarian case, followed

¹ David Bloxham, "From Streicher to Sawoniuk: The Holocaust in the Courtroom," in *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, ed. Dan Stone (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 401 (*italics mine*).

by the analysis of a special aspect of Holocaust memorialization based on testimonies of the Visual History Archive.

How is the survival of 140,000 Jews in Hungary connected to the two foundational assumptions of the literature? In a book coauthored with Ildikó Barna, we offered evidence that these two foundational assumptions do not apply in Hungary, where Jewish survivors were able, in part, to realize their interests in the justice system during the postwar era.² We used quantitative research methods to examine the records of the people's courts, which shed light not only on the identity of Jews who became complainants in the trials, but also on their experiences during the trials. We have argued that the experiences of Jews participating in the post-WWII trials as witnesses, judges, lawyers or spectators contributed to the formation of Jewish survivors' identity.³ The research examined 500 out of 22,000 files created by the People's Court of Budapest (1945–49) to identify the participants of this juridical process that has major importance for the construction of the memory of the Shoah.

We are faced with a very complicated matrix here, as far as the memory of the Shoah is concerned: the two foundational assumptions of post-Shoah retributive justice are not applicable to Hungary. To make the analysis of this intersection even more complex, there is the present memory debate in Hungary, which is caught between the “true memories,” told by the survivors and the “true facts” narrated by qualified historians (who are themselves in the midst of a battle among historians). Who is qualified to tell the truth?

Having all these complexities in mind, in this chapter I would like to limit the focus by examining one case study: Jewish participation in the people's tribunals in Budapest. With this my aim is to contribute to the present discussion on the memory of the Holocaust in Hungary, and to draw attention to a particular intersection, that of people's tribunals, testimonies, and the digital. I am using the testimonies of the Visual History Archive as a source to move beyond the cleavages between memories and facts as well as the two foundational assumptions described in the introduction of this chapter, and doing so I will argue for an understanding of the different types of truth constructed by digital storytelling.

² Ildikó Barna and Andrea Pető, *Political Justice in Budapest after World War II* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2015).

³ On Jewish lawyers in Hungary, see Andrea Pető, “‘I Switched Sides’: Lawyers Creating the Memory of Shoah in Budapest,” in *Confronting the Past: European Experiences*, ed. Davor Pauković, Vjeran Pavlaković, and Višeslav Raos (Zagreb: CPI [Centar za politoloska istrazivanja], 2012), 223–35.

The Source: The Visual History Archive

The Visual History Archive (VHA) consists of 52,000 complete, video-recorded testimonies that can be viewed at length at the access points. The interviews are chronological life story interviews; the interviewers were trained beforehand plus they were provided with more or less similar interview guidelines. The interviews are indexed by subject, geographical location and name; and can be searched by sex and language. This is an outstanding collection, which will influence the formation of Holocaust memory for decades or, optimistically, centuries to come.

For this chapter I viewed interviews with survivors who were talking about the immediate postwar trials in Hungary. The goal was to detect and analyze the narrative constructions they used to narrate tabooed and silenced experiences. Since thus far the literature considered that the experiences of Jews participating in trials do not exist, there are no consensual narrative frames available either.

As far as the general criticism regarding the collection is concerned, I partly agree with the comment formulated by Annette Wieviorka, who blames the collection for the “Americanization of the Holocaust,” and claims that the massive collection of interviews resulted in nothing else but myriads of “authentic” witness stories.⁴ However, her views can be criticized both on political and methodological grounds.

The political ground of the first criticism is based on the understanding that the more survivors story collected the more possibility is there to combat antisemitism and racism.⁵ Had the Shoah Foundation not collected these stories, they would have been lost forever. The 800 interviews made with Hungarian survivors will make a difference in the future as far as politics of memory is concerned.

The methodological criticism tackles the question of what we can do with this massive digital archive that has been already created. It would be a mistake to dismiss it as an unprofessionally collected, mass, “Americanized” collection, the way Wieviorka does. Rather, I argue that scholarship should strive to understand the peculiarities of this collection given by its digital

⁴ Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 95–145.

⁵ More on this see: *The Future of Holocaust Memorialisation. Confronting Racism, Anti-Semitism, and Homophobia Through Memory Work*, eds. Andrea Pető, Helga Thorson, (Tom Lantos Institute, Budapest, 2015).

format. Therefore, in this chapter I am interested in the narrative framework used by the survivors: how do they talk about the post-WWII trials in the interviews they gave for the VHA? I was asking this question for the following reason: I was curious about how survivors were narrating an atypical story, namely their own participation in the postwar legal processes.

The VHA's collection is being used for various purposes. First and foremost to give personal authenticity to the canonized Holocaust narrative in secondary-level education.⁶ Also, certain key concepts like antisemitism, or events like *Kristallnacht* are taught via these video testimonies, which in these cases are used as proofs. The trauma stories in the collection have been analyzed from the point of view of how stories of pain, discrimination, and persecution are narrated. However, the testimonies analyzed in this chapter—the stories of revenge and satisfaction—were rarely voiced before due to the taboo surrounding these experiences.

Survivor Narratives of Postwar Trials

In what follows I will analyze how the agency of the survivors is constructed in the VHA testimonies. As far as methodology is concerned, I interpret court trials as social dramas or, as Turner defined them: “units of a harmonic or disharmonic process, arising in conflict situations”⁷ that entail four phases: the breaching of the norm, the crisis, the remediating action, and the reintegration of the disturbed social group.⁸ Thus, I am analyzing these stories, which the survivors narrated as social dramas, as the breaching of the norm, because revenge and the feeling of satisfaction that comes with revenge were tabooed by 1998–2000 when the interviews were made. In other words, I am using social drama as an analytical framework for understanding the survivors’ role in the process.

In the survivors’ narratives about the trials five factors can be detected, which are actually influencing the construction of memory and influencing the level of agency of the survivors.

⁶ For more on this, see Andrea Pető, “How to Use the Shoah Foundation’s Visual History Archive for Teaching at the Graduate Level: A Methodological and Theoretical Reflection,” in *Jewish Studies at the CEU, 2009–2011, Vol. VII*, ed. András Kovács and Michael Miller (Budapest: CEU Jewish Studies Project, 2013), 205–11.

⁷ Victor Turner, *Dramas, Field, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), 37.

⁸ Turner, *Dramas*, 38–41.

The first factor is the temporality of the interviews. Those who were interviewed for the Visual History Archive were very young during the postwar trials. They did not serve as witnesses in the trials, but they were participating as members of the audience. Therefore, their stories are influenced by youthful romanticism about survivors who sneak into the courtroom, etc., creating a very specific memory.

The second factor is related to the sampling of the interviewees. Representativity should not be an issue. Due to the demographic characteristics of the surviving Hungarian Jewry large percentage of the survivors interviewed for the project are living in Budapest, and they are mostly intellectuals.⁹ Therefore, the stories I am analyzing in this chapter are not representative but typical stories.

The third factor is the general silence about feelings of satisfaction and happiness experienced when witnessing trials and executions. This is a strictly taboo topic. The post-WWII trials were expected to negotiate and harmonize emotions to form “emotional communities”¹⁰ besides marking what is good/bad/acceptable. The court was a highly ritualized space where the audience was expected to be silent, therefore we can access the emotions constructed during the trials only through the testimonies. Emotions usually escape the attention of historians, as they do not leave any written trace behind. The VHA video testimony collection is unique as it explicitly asks questions about feelings.¹¹

The fourth factor is how the changing frames of collective memory influence the process of narration. The problem of “memory gap” is well known in the Holocaust literature.¹² The interviews were made after 1989 when the thus far dominant antifascist history and history telling frameworks were being questioned; and simultaneously, a separate sphere was opened for giving testimonies to a US-based foundation. The survivors narrated their experiences of the trials in different sites: first in the midst

⁹ For more, see Victor Karady, *Túlélők és újrakezdők: Fejezetek a magyar zsidóság szociológiájából 1945 után* (Budapest: Múlt és Jövő. 2002).

¹⁰ Barbara Rosenwein, “Worrying about Emotions in History,” *American Historical Review* 107.3 (2002): 842.

¹¹ More on this, see Andrea Pető, “Historicizing Hate: Testimonies and Photos about the Holocaust Trauma during the Hungarian post-WWII Trials,” in *Tapestry of Memory: Evidence and Testimony in Life-Story Narratives*, ed. Nanci Adler and Selma Leydesdorff (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2013), 3–19.

¹² Grünfeld quoted in Ronit Lentin, “Expected to Live: Women Shoah Survivors’ Testimonial Silence,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 23.6 (2001): 691.

of their own families, and later, in 1998 for the recorded interview for the public collection. The recording of the interview meant to keep this particular version of the story for eternity. The interviews for the VHA were all recorded in the homes of the interviewees, in a seemingly private sphere, but this private sphere was not really private. The camera recording the interview opens up the private space into a semi-private public space. The camera represents the audience, as Laub underlined it in his analysis of the Fortunoff collection, the other major video interview collection. The interviewees were waiting for this possibility to be listened to for the past fifty years. For them the interview meant the moment of entry into history as a witness on their own terms. Wiewiorka analyzed whether they were really entering “on their own terms,” asking how the framing of the interview questions could have influenced the way survivors were talking about their experiences. Surely, in the interview guide there was a question about postwar trials, which actually made it possible to tell these stories, but the stories prompted by this question were continuous and uninterrupted narratives. Thus, it is an important finding that these interviewees wanted to be remembered or they want these stories—even the taboo topics—to be remembered. As one of the survivors said: “I have never told this story as I am telling it now.”¹³

The fifth factor is related to the topic of witnessing. The Visual History Archive is a mass collection. Such a massive number of Holocaust testimonies open up space for a new conceptualization of witnessing. Paul Frosh pointed out “the significance of witnessing for contemporary conjunctions between personal experience, shareable knowledge, and public representation.”¹⁴ He also claims, that “mass media witnessing is routinized and depersonalized in a way that is morally enabling because it maintains a ground of ‘indifferent’ civil equivalence among strangers.”¹⁵ Therein lies the power of the VHA collection. The Holocaust stories are becoming routinized and depersonalized through individualization and particularization, and this framework then opens up space for describing

¹³ Visual History Archive (hereafter VHA), Vicsekne Zsuzsa testimony (50208), “Gyeremekeim estimatesje volt (saját megmenekülésének története P. A.). Soha nem meséltem nekik úgy, ahogy most mesélek.” Thanks to Peter Berczi for his assistance.

¹⁴ Paul Frosh, “Telling Presences: Witnessing, Mass Media, and the Imagined Lives of Strangers,” in *Media Witnessing: Testimony in the Age of Mass Communication*, ed. Paul Frosh (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 51.

¹⁵ Ibid.

taboo topics as well. The camera, as it was argued before, represents the logic of impersonality. Therefore, the argument of Annette Wiewiorka, who criticized the collection exactly for this reason, is very limited and limiting. I am arguing here that this “factory-like” routinized frame of remembrance opens up space for stories of revenge and satisfaction which have been previously tabooed. The survivor’s agency has been constructed via these discussions.

Analysis of the Testimonies

As the sampling is not representative, a quantitative analysis of the revenge or satisfaction stories among the 800 testimonies from Hungary will not provide more information about the narratives. However, a surprisingly large number of stories remains silent about these experiences despite the fact that the interview guide offered space for raising related questions. A typical testimony describes how the interviewee recalls the process of rationalization of what has happened to them during the last years of the war: “One was full of revenge as a small kid, [because] they did this to us. Our affluent life had been destroyed. They pinned stars on us. Who did that? The Arrow Cross members. Then the trials came. These comrades, excuse me, these brothers were condemned to death one by one.”¹⁶ The stories play an important role in identity construction, as the phrase “we took revenge” was mentioned several times. “It did not have an atmosphere. This was a showdown. Nothing could be done here. There was no possibility to deny.”¹⁷

The borders of collective identity of the surviving Jews, which were based on suffering and persecution, were marked by these stories. Those survivors who were among the audience in the courtroom narrated how seeing the trial itself offered a sense of revenge. In the testimonies they referred to the perpetrators via nicknames or diminutives (“my fellow”¹⁸

¹⁶ VHA, Otto Gyepes testimony (51012), “Az ember tele volt bosszúvággal, mint kisgyerek, hogy velünk ezt csinálták. Kizökkentettek a megszokott jó módból. Csillagot tűztek ránk. Kik csinálták? Hát a nyilasok. Akkor jöttek a tárgyalások.... Egymás után ítélték el ezeket az elvtársakat, bocsánat testvéreket halálra.”

¹⁷ VHA, Gábor József testimony (51576), “[N]em volt hangulata. Ez egy leszámolás volt. Itt nem lehetett tagadni.”

¹⁸ VHA, Anna Jávör testimony (51859), “a lelkem,” referring to the executed war criminal

“boy”¹⁹) to act out their power over them. During the trials they exercised the power of the gaze while watching those who harmed them and their families. As these courtrooms were full it was easy to get bodily access to the perpetrators. According to the narrations physical violence was also present in the courtroom.

I had one good experience when I had the opportunity to kick that Arrow Cross member. It happened when there was a pause, I do not know if it was because of a closed trial or it was just a break, but the guards were taking him, and I went to him and nicely kicked his leg. One of the elderly guards allowed me to kick and after that he said, ‘What are you doing, go away.’ But he let me kick.²⁰

Kicking and spitting were part of these interactions, but mostly shouting was mentioned: “The court room was full. Lots of people were present. Everybody was shouting: ‘Hang them!’”²¹ The narrations are influenced by details and toolkit from other sources. It is irrelevant that they are narrating the events as their own stories as they have been personally present in the courtroom; very often they engage in a secondary narration. Compared to newsreel coverage of executions of high-profile criminals, the stories demonstrate an astonishing similarity.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed to investigate the intersection of people’s courts, testimonies, and the digital in order to contribute to the understanding of the complexities of narrating tabooed stories by the Hungarian survivors.

¹⁹ VHA, Hajdú Tibor testimony (50918), “Azt kérdezte ettől a fiútól....”

²⁰ VHA, Szegre Erika testimony (51231), “Még egy jó élményem volt, hogy belerúghattam ebbe a nyilasba. Úgy történt, hogy mikor szünet volt, nem tudom, hogy a zárt tárgyalás miatt vagy csak a szünet volt. De a börtönőrök fogták, én meg odamentem és szépen belerúgtam a lábába. Az egyik idősebb börtönőr, aki szépen hagyta, hogy belerúgjak és utána mondta, hogy mit csinál maga és menjen innen. De hagyta, hogy belerúgjak.”

²¹ VHA, Almásy Tibor (27346), “Tele volt a törvényszék. Rengeteg ember volt. Mindenki kiabált: kötele!”

One of my arguments is that the massive, standardized collection of VHA opened up space for narrating previously silenced and tabooed narratives.

Brooks, following Freud, differentiates between “material truth” and “psychic truth” in psychoanalysis, which is “that truth of mind and emotions that offers a coherent and therapeutic life narrative ... and is not wholly dependent on referential truth or correspondence to a set of facts.”²² I am arguing in this chapter that during giving testimony at the People’s Tribunals, parts of the “material truth” were revealed but without the “psychic truth,” and this contributed to a controversial construction of collective memory. In the testimonies given to the Shoah Foundation just the opposite happened: the “psychic truth” was revealed without the “material truth” being significant at all. Therefore both sources are important in their own ways, while together they are showcasing the complexities of the history of the Holocaust.

Lastly, I would like to return to the opening statements: I argued that the mainstream historical narrative often muted narratives and invisibilized survivors of the Shoah as agents of their own stories. Looking at different sites of communicative memory, like the post-WWII trials or the digitalized visual memory of the trials, reminds us how fragile and permeable the definition of memory is.

²² Peter Brooks, *Troubling Confessions: Speaking Guilt in Law and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 118.

Hungary: The Assault on the Historical Memory of the Holocaust

Randolph L. Braham

Memoria est thesaurus omnium rerum et custos.
(Memory is the treasury and guardian of all things.)
—Cicero

The Launching of the Campaign

The Communist Era

As in many other countries in Nazi-dominated Europe, in Hungary the assault on the historical integrity of the Holocaust began before the war had come to an end. While many thousands of Hungarian Jews still were lingering in concentration camps, those Jews liberated by the Red Army, including those of Budapest, soon were warned not to seek any advantages as a consequence of their suffering. This time the campaign was launched from the left. The Communists and their allies, who also had been persecuted by the Nazis, were engaged in a political struggle for the acquisition of state power. To acquire the support of those Christian masses who remained intoxicated with antisemitism, and with many of those in possession of stolen and/or “legally” allocated Jewish-owned property, leftist leaders were among the first to use the method of “generalization” in their attack on the facticity and specificity of the Holocaust. Claiming that the events that had befallen the Jews were part and parcel of the catastrophe that had engulfed most Europeans during the Second World War, they called upon the survivors to give up any particularist claims and participate instead in the building of a new “egalitarian”

society. As early as late March 1945, József Darvas, the noted populist writer and leader of the National Peasant Party, asserted that “no one may claim any privileges on the basis of former suffering.” On August 26, 1945, he reiterated this anti-Jewish position by stating that “a certain group should not demand preferential treatment on the ground of racial prerogatives.” The incitements by the Communists soon led to the spread of blood-libel rumors and to pogroms in several cities, including Kunmadaras and Miskolc.¹

Following their acquisition of power in 1949, the Communist-dominated government of Hungary largely put an end to physical attacks on Jews, but soon began an assault on the memory of the Holocaust. That regime pursued this goal concurrent with the Soviet-led antisemitic campaign against “cosmopolitanism” and Zionism, and soon began attempts that sought the delegitimization of the State of Israel. As a consequence, the Holocaust, like the “the Jewish question” in general, were for many decades sunk in an Orwellian black hole of history.

Unlike in the West, however, where the campaign to distort, denigrate, and actually deny the Holocaust has been waged freely by so-called “historical revisionists,” the campaign in the Soviet bloc had been pursued under strict state control with its intensity varying in accordance with the changing political interests of the Kremlin.²

The Post-Communist Era

Following the dissolution of the Communist regimes and the disintegration of the Soviet bloc in the late 1980s, “historical revisionism” also infected the xenophobic nationalist stratum of Hungarian society. Ironically, this new strain came to the fore following the liberalization measures that the first democratically elected government adopted after the systemic change of 1989. The political stresses and socioeconomic dislocations engendered by the new administration’s privatization and marketization measures enabled the xenophobic nationalist-populist elements to revive both “the Jewish question” and antisemitism as con-

¹ Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 1312–13.

² For some details, see Randolph L. Braham, “Revisionism: Historical, Political, and Legal Implications,” in *Comprehending the Holocaust: Historical and Literary Research*, ed. Asher Cohen et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1988), 61–96.

venient instruments of domestic politics. The number of Hungarian xenophobic champions of antisemitism has grown since the Communist government was supplanted, constituting an increasing danger not only to the integrity of the historical record of the Holocaust but also to the newly established democratic system. The current danger is represented not so much by the “historical revisionists” who vocally deny the Holocaust—they most probably will end up in the dung heap of history—but by “respectable public figures”—members and heads of government, parliamentarians, and high-ranking officers. The rhetoric and tactics of these respectable individuals vary in terms of their particular political-ideological group interests and personal ambitions. The leaders of the successive democratically elected Hungarian governments have, with a few exceptions, consistently pursued policies that one has more than ample justification to believe are aimed to:

1. Bring about the rehabilitation of the Horthy era and the revitalization of the national-Christian principles that had guided it
2. Absolve Hungary of any guilt for the Holocaust by placing ultimate responsibility on the Germans
3. Deflect attention from the Holocaust by focusing on the “positive” experiences of the Jews since their emancipation in 1867 and on the rescue activities of Christian Hungarians during the German occupation, including Horthy’s halting of the deportations in early July 1944

To achieve these evident objectives the successive governments have supported with various degrees of enthusiasm the efforts of “patriotic-nationalist” groups and individuals who have, in effect, engaged in cleansing the historical record of Hungary. That amounts to falsifying the historical record of the Nazi era in general and of the Holocaust in particular. Like their counterparts elsewhere in the former Nazi-dominated world, Hungarian history-cleansers have, among other things, adopted the historical technique of “denationalization,” to prove Hungary’s “innocence” during the Holocaust, and that of “relativization” and “trivialization,” to demonstrate that the number of the Nazi victims was dwarfed by that caused by Communism, and that the Holocaust was but a relatively minor factor during the Second World War.

This study documents the policies of the successive Hungarian governments since 1989, critically evaluating the various approaches they have used to reach what manifestly must be recognized as national self-

exculpatory objectives.³ It also aims to identify the historical context in which these policies were formulated, focusing on the radical “constitutional” and other “legal” and politically oriented Holocaust-related measures that were introduced following the inauguration of the Viktor Orbán-led government in 2010.

The Facts under Siege

In March 1944, Hungary had a Jewish population of more than 800,000 (including the approximately 100,000 Christians and converts who were identified as Jews under the racial laws then in effect). They constituted the last relatively intact Jewish community in Nazi-dominated Europe. Having survived throughout most of the war, they were destroyed on the eve of Allied victory with the connivance of their own government. An ally of Nazi Germany, Hungary, beginning in early 1938, instituted a series of increasingly severe anti-Jewish measures that not only curtailed the basic civil and socioeconomic rights of the Jews⁴ but also claimed approximately 60,000 Jewish lives by early 1944.⁵ Nevertheless, the bulk of Hungarian Jewry survived the first four and a half years of the war “thanks” to their physical protection by the conservative–aristocratic government of Miklós Kállay. After the beginning of the German occupation of March 19, 1944, however, it was this relatively intact Jewish community that was subjected to the most concentrated ghettoization and deportation process

³ Some parts of this study were reproduced from an article published in *East European Quarterly* 33.4 (2000): 411–25, and in *Hungary and the Holocaust: Confrontation with the Past: Symposium Proceedings* (Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2001), 45–75.

⁴ Between May 14, 1938, and March 27, 1945, the Hungarian authorities issued many hundreds of anti-Jewish “legal” measures. For details, see László Karsai, “Anti-Jewish Laws and Decrees in Hungary, 1920–1944,” in *The Holocaust in Hungary: A European Perspective*, ed. Judit Molnár (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2005), 143–79.

⁵ Approximately 40,000 of these were labor servicemen; 18,000 to 20,000 were the so-called “alien” Jews who were deported in the summer of 1941 and murdered near Kamianets-Podilskyi and the remainder were the victims of the massacre in and around Újvidék early in 1942. See Braham, *Politics*, 205–18. See also Krisztián Ungváry, *A Horthy rendszer mérlege: Diszkrimináció, szociálpolitika és antiszemitizmus* [The balance of the Horthy regime: Discrimination, social politics and antisemitism] (Budapest: Jelenkor Kiadó, 2013).

of the Nazis' Final Solution program.⁶ The murderous drive against the Hungarian Jews was launched almost immediately after the beginning of the occupation that was welcomed not only by the military but also by a large stratum of the population.⁷ By that time the leaders of the world, including those of Hungary, were already familiar with the realities of Auschwitz. By that time, too, even many among the Nazis realized that the Axis would lose the war. It was precisely because of this prospect that the Germans and their Hungarian accomplices decided to win at least the campaign against the Jews. Time was clearly of the essence. The Red Army was fast approaching Romania, and the Western Allies were expected to launch their main invasion of Europe soon.

The Nazis' machinery of destruction was already well oiled by 1944. With experience gained through the mass murder of Jews from almost all over German-dominated Europe, the Nazis were ready and well prepared for a lightning operation in Hungary. Their initial fear at that juncture of the losing war was that Miklós Horthy, the Hungarian head of state, might emulate the latter-day position of Marshal Ion Antonescu of Romania, and prevent the full implementation of the Final Solution by identifying the Jewish question as a domestic issue. The Germans' concern was dissipated soon after the occupation began. Adolf Eichmann, the experienced head of a small but efficient SS unit, was amazed at the enthusiasm with which members of the new Döme Sztójay government—all constitutionally appointed by Horthy—proved ready to "solve" the Jewish question.⁸ This new government placed the instruments of state power—the gendarmerie, police, and civil service—at the disposal of those Hungarians and German Nazis bent on the swiftest possible implementation of the Final Solution. With Horthy still at the helm and providing the symbol of national sover-

⁶ For details on Hitler's decision to occupy Hungary, see Braham, *Politics*, 381–405.

⁷ When Maximilian von Weichs, the general in command of the invading forces, was asked about the time he would need to accomplish his mission, he said 24 hours. "And in case of resistance?" he was asked. He responded 12 hours, because in that case there would be no welcoming speeches to attend. Krisztián Ungváry, "Kinek az emlékműve?" [Whose monument?], *Népszava/Szabadság* [New York], January 31, 2014.

⁸ Seeing the enthusiasm with which his Hungarian accomplices carried out the Final Solution program, Eichmann commented that the Hungarians must surely be descended from the Huns since nowhere else had he seen so much brutality. The newly appointed government of Sztójay included nine members of the deposed Kállay government. Krisztián Ungváry, "Az eleven borzalom" [The living horror], *HVG.hu*, January 21, 2014.

eignty, the approximately 200,000 Hungarian policemen, gendarmes, civil servants, and “patriotic” volunteers had collaborated in the anti-Jewish drive with a routine and efficiency that impressed even the relatively few SS who had served as “advisors.” Within less than two months—that is from late March to mid-May, 1944—those in charge of the Final Solution completed the first phase of the anti-Jewish drive. Acting in accordance with the provisions of the many laws, decrees, and orders issued by the central and the regional governmental organs, the Jews were isolated, marked, robbed of their possessions, and placed into ghettos. During the next two months—from May 15 through July 9—they were subjected to the most barbaric and speedy deportation and extermination program of the war. It was so massive and so swift that the crematoria in Auschwitz-Birkenau, updated as they were, could not cope. Special ditches had to be dug to burn the thousands of victims the crematoria could not handle. When Winston Churchill was informed about this catastrophe, he referred to it as “probably the greatest and most horrible crime ever committed in the history of the world.”⁹ In sheer numbers the mass murder of the Hungarian Jews overshadowed the losses of many major combatants of the Second World War.¹⁰

⁹ For details, consult Braham, *Politics*. For additional scholarly accounts and personal narratives, consult the *Bibliography of the Holocaust in Hungary*, ed. Randolph L. Braham (Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs, 2011).

¹⁰ The magnitude of the crime committed by the Nazis and their Hungarian accomplices is dramatically illustrated by the following comparative statistical data. Three transports arrived in Auschwitz-Birkenau with nearly 12,000 Jews from Northern Transylvania on June 6, 1944. Better known as D-Day, this was one of the most magnificent days in the annals of military history, when the greatest multinational armada ever assembled under one command stormed the beaches of Normandy. By the end of that day, the number of invading Allied troops killed was about half that of the Hungarian Jews murdered during the same period. While the Allies’ killed-in-action figures declined dramatically after the toehold had been gained on Normandy later that day, the Hungarian Jews continued to be murdered at almost the same high rate day after day until July 9, continuing the awesome daily massacre rate that began on May 16. In the end, the wartime losses of Hungarian Jewry significantly exceeded those incurred by the military forces of the United States in all theaters of war, just as they also significantly exceeded the combined military and civilian war deaths of the British, a nation that bore much of the German military onslaught. These comparisons are cited not to minimize the sacrifices or diminish the heroism of the Western Allies but simply to underscore the magnitude of the Holocaust in Hungary.

Stages of the Assault

The Hungarian chapter of the Holocaust of European Jewry constitutes not only the greatest tragedy in the history of Hungarian Jewry but also the darkest chapter in the history of Hungary. Never before in the history of the Hungarian nation were so many people expropriated and murdered in so short a time as in 1944. Most of the hundreds of thousands of victims were Hungarian citizens who had proudly considered themselves “Magyars of the Jewish faith.” To the chagrin of the other ethnic-national minorities of Hungary, most Jews were patriotic and had been firmly committed to the Magyar cause since 1848. They were the forerunners of Hungary’s modernization and champions of the Hungarian language and culture even in the territories Hungary lost under the Treaty of Trianon in 1920. At the end, however, they fared less well than the other ethnic and national groups. They were destroyed with the connivance of the Magyars they had so eagerly supported and implicitly trusted.

The facts of this apocalyptic chapter in the history of Hungary have not yet sunk into the national consciousness of the Hungarian people. The reasons are many and complex. The wartime history of Hungary, including the Holocaust, has been manipulated by the successive postwar regimes to serve their particular political interests.

The Immediate Postwar Era

During the immediate postwar period, the needs and interests of the survivors came into conflict with the political aspirations of the various parties. It is one of the ironies of history that, at the end, the surviving remnant of Hungarian Jewry suffered most at the hands of the very political party that many of them had trusted as their genuine supporter and whose members, like the Jews, had been a main target of the Nazis and of the Horthy regime: the Communist Party. During the immediate postwar era, many of the victimized Jews placed their faith in that party, believing that it was the only one that was genuinely free of any stain of Fascism. They also considered it reliable for the advancement of their legitimate interests, including the roundup and prosecution of war criminals, the effectuation of an equitable restitution and reparation program, and the building of a just and egalitarian society. The Jewish survivors were soon awakened to the political realities of the postwar power struggle. Small and generally mistrusted by the ethnic majority, the Communist Party had no scruples

about sacrificing the interests of the Jews in order to build a popular base for the acquisition of state power. Driven by political expediency, the party leadership, which included a proportionately large number of Communists of Jewish origin, urged the survivors to forget about their past suffering, abandon their demands for restitution, and subordinate their special needs to the building of the new socialist society. With the exception of the relatively few diehards who remained loyal to their ideology and newly acquired power, the survivors soon discovered that it was the Communist Party's search for mass support that was in fact largely behind the antisemitic agitation and the several "spontaneous" anti-Jewish outbursts and pogroms that occurred during the immediate postwar period.¹¹

During the Stalinist era, the Holocaust was virtually sunk into the Orwellian black hole of history. The Jewish martyrs were subsumed as part of the losses incurred by the population at large. The survivors themselves were subjected to many inequities. Many of them found themselves persecuted on both social and religious-political grounds. They were either identified as members of "the exploiting bourgeoisie" or accused of the sins of Zionism and cosmopolitanism. Many among these Jews were once again deported to Soviet-style camps for "reeducation," often in the company of their former tormentors. Others were either jailed or deprived of a livelihood. In the course of time even the Communist Party itself was purged of a considerable part of its Jewish component to make it more attractive to the ethnic majority.¹²

During the Kádár era that followed the Uprising of 1956, the Jewish question and the issue of antisemitism, while persistent at the popular level, were kept under control by the government. Consistent with the policies of the previous governments, public awareness of the Holocaust continued to remain low even though Hungary—unlike the other Soviet bloc countries—witnessed the appearance of several important documentary and historical publications on the tragedy of Hungarian Jewry.¹³

¹¹ For details, see László Lengyel, "Keserű konszolidáció" [Bitter consolidation], 2000 1–2. (2012), (<http://ketezer.hu/2012/01/lengyel-laszlo-keseru-konszolidacio/>). See also Róbert Szabó Győri, *A kommunista párt és a zsidóság* [The Communist Party and Jewry] (Budapest: Windsor Kiadó, 1997); László Csósz, "Népirás után: zsidóellenes atrocitások Magyarországon, 1945–1948" [After genocide: 1945–1948 anti-Jewish atrocities in Hungary], http://konfliktuskutato.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=148:nepirtas-utan-zsidoeellenes-atrocitasok-magyarorszagon-1945-1948-&catid=15:tanulmanyok.

¹² Győri, *A kommunista párt*. See especially pp. 179–283.

¹³ Among the most important of these publications are the three-volume *Vádirat a náciizmus ellen* [Indictment of Nazism] (1960–1967) by Elek Karsai and Ilona

The Post-Communist Era

The systemic change in the Soviet bloc nations began in Hungary as early as 1987. It was spearheaded by the reformist group within the ruling Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt). Defying the Kremlin, Imre Pozsgay, one of the leaders of this group, identified the Hungarian revolution of 1956 as a popular uprising rather than a counterrevolution, leading thereby to a public discussion of other hitherto prohibited topics such as Trianon and gradually even the Holocaust. Since the triumph of democracy in 1989, the Holocaust has emerged as an "embarrassing" topic for the various governments that succeeded the Communist regime. Driven largely by domestic and international political considerations, the elected national leaders of the new democratic society have reacted to the Holocaust in a different manner, which, in turn, determined the level and intensity of the assault on historical memory during their administration. While most of the heads of state and government publicly acknowledged the wartime tragedy of the Jews and have consistently committed themselves, especially during Holocaust remembrance occasions, to combating the scourge of antisemitism, none of them had so far the courage to officially apologize for that tragedy in a special address to the nation.

In the absence of unambiguous and unequivocal moral guidance on the Holocaust, the history-cleansers appear to have been given a green light to "safeguard the national honor of Hungary" by absolving that nation of any responsibility. The offensive against the historical memory of the Holocaust was spearheaded not only by the "historical revisionists," but also—and more important—by an ever-larger group of sophisticated degree-holding history-cleansers. These "patriotic" professionals have dedicated themselves to rewriting the Horthy era, ostensibly to assure an "unblemished" historical continuity.

The initial steps in this direction were taken during the tenure of József Antall, Jr., the first democratically elected prime minister of post-

Benoschofsky; Karsai's two-volume *"Fegyvertelen álltak az aknamezőkön..."* [They stood unarmed in the mine fields...] (1962); Mária Ember's *Hajtűkanyar* [Hairpin bend] (1974); György Száraz's *Egy előítélet nyomában* [In the footsteps of a prejudice] (1976); and István Nemeskürty's *Requiem egy hadseregért* [Requiem for an army] (1972).

Communist Hungary (May 23, 1990–December 12, 1993).¹⁴ A leader of the Hungarian Democratic Forum (Magyar Demokrata Fórum [MDF]), a political party that included such notoriously antisemitic figures as István Csurka¹⁵ and Sándor Csoóri, Antall had dedicated himself to rebuilding Hungary along national-Christian lines reminiscent of the Horthy era. He spearheaded the rehabilitation of former prime minister Pál Teleki, the author of several major anti-Jewish laws, and launched the campaign to bring about the rehabilitation of the former regent as well. It was he in fact who first aimed to unburden the national conscience over the Holocaust by consistently repudiating the idea of any official apology. It was also Antall who first suggested that in any discussion of the Holocaust, if it must be discussed at all, emphasis should be placed on the rescue activities of the Righteous rather than on the perpetrators.¹⁶

It was during Antall's administration that the drive to bring about the rehabilitation of Miklós Horthy gained momentum. A major step in this direction was the political resurrection of the former regent by returning his

¹⁴ While in Budapest for the inauguration of *A magyar holocaust*, the Hungarian translation of my *The Politics of Genocide* in late January 1989, József Antall, Jr., then executive director of the Semmelweis Museum of Medical History, Library and Archives (Semmelweis Orvostörténeti Múzeum, Könyvtár és Levéltár), gently reproached me for not having written anything about his father, József Antall, Sr., who as head of a section in the Ministry of the Interior in charge of refugees had saved a large number of Polish Jewish and non-Jewish refugees during the war. Relating to his father's activities, he sent me a number of archival documents that I later used in the second editions of both the English and Hungarian versions of my two-volume work. On August 28, 2011, Reverend Tamás Majsai, a highly respected student of the Holocaust, sent me a copy of a forthcoming study that included several disturbing documents about Antall's wartime activities. According to Majsai's documentation, Antall, Sr., had in fact agitated against the Jewish refugees who sought or actually found refuge in Hungary. Tamás Majsai, "A Soá Magyarországon 1941-ben" [The Shoah in Hungary in 1941], in *Tilalomfák ellenében. Köszöntő könyv Várdy Péter 75. születésnapjára* [Congratulatory volume on Péter Várdy's 75th birthday], ed. Tamás Majsai (Budapest: Wesley János Lelkészképző Főiskola, 2010), 83–115.

¹⁵ Csurka was expelled from Antall's MDF on June 5, 1993, and on July 15, 1993, he founded the neo-Fascist Hungarian Justice and Life Party (Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja [MIÉP]). He continued to be one of Hungary's leading antisemitic figures until his death on February 4, 2012.

¹⁶ See László Karsai, "The Radical Right in Hungary," in *The Radical Right in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 133–46. See also his "Mitoszok, rágalmak és pártpropaganda" [Myths, slanders, and party propaganda] *Kritika*, Budapest, December 1990, 22–26, and January 1991, 27–30.

and his family's remains from Portugal and reburying them with the pomp and circumstance befitting a former head of state.¹⁷ Antall's informal guidelines relating to the treatment of the Holocaust were soon abused by neo-antisemitic nationalists. Taking advantage of the new democratic freedoms, some of them openly resorted to anti-Jewish diatribes. Sándor Csoóri, one of Hungary's most celebrated writers of the period, for example, advanced the notion that "liberal Hungarian Jewry wanted to 'assimilate' the Magyars in style and thought." Reminiscent of the anti-Jewish campaign of the Horthy era, his message implied that the surviving remnant of Hungarian Jewry had become a threat to the Christian Magyars.¹⁸

Antall's successor, prime minister Péter Boross (December 12, 1993–July 15, 1994), was considerably more active in encouraging and supporting the history-cleansers. As the spiritus rector of the ultra-nationalist drive to rehabilitate the Horthy regime, Boross has become a leading champion for the restoration of the national-Christian tradition in Hungary. He also emerged as one of the most vocal supporters of the Holocaust-denigrating drive not only during his administration but also during the tenure of Viktor Orbán as prime minister.¹⁹

¹⁷ The remains of the regent were brought back from Portugal, together with those of his wife and youngest son, and reinterred in their home town of Kenderes on September 4, 1993. Among the tens of thousands of Hungarians attending the reburial were a few leading members of the Antall government, including Péter Boross, Lajos Für, László Surján, István Balsai, and Béla Kádár. Randolph L. Braham, "The Reinterment and Political Rehabilitation of Miklós Horthy," in *Slavic Almanach*, Vol. 2, ed. Henrietta Mondry and Paul Schweiger (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 1993), 137–40. See also my "Horthy Miklós újratemetése és politikai feltámadása" [The reburial and political resurrection of Miklós Horthy], *Menóra*, Toronto, August 27, 1993, and reproduced in *Népszava/Szabadság*, New York, September 27, 2013.

¹⁸ Csoóri's diatribe was part of his autobiographical series *Nappali Hold* [Daytime moon], published in *Hitel* [Credit], Budapest, September 5, 1990, 6. Like others, Csoóri singles out a few noted writers and poets, including Antal Szerb, Miklós Radnóti, and György Konrád, as "good Hungarians." The contrasting of a few "prominent" Jews with the rest of Jewry was also the technique used by Bishop Ottokár Prohászka, the notorious Catholic Jew-baiter, and Miklós Horthy himself.

¹⁹ For an overview of Péter Boross's political background and Holocaust-related views, see "A Horthy-rendszer rehabilitálása zajlik? A Szabad szemmel vendége volt Boros Péter volt miniszterelnök" [Is the rehabilitation of the Horthy system drifting? Péter Boross, the former prime minister, was the guest of the *Open Eye* program], <http://www.atv.hu/video/video-20140203-a-horthy-rendszer-rehabilitalasa-zajlik>. See also László Bartus, "Boross," *Amerikai Népszava*, New York, February 3, 2014.

The integrity of the historical record of the Holocaust suffered a further setback early in 1994, when the Constitutional Court (*Alkotmánybíróság*) that was established in late 1989 nullified many provisions of the People's Tribunals Act (Law No. VII of 1945). It soon led to the reversal of convictions of many individuals who had been involved in various degrees in the implementation of the Final Solution program.²⁰ Concluding that the wartime activities of the convicted individuals were not deemed criminally punishable at the time of their commission, the court enabled the rehabilitation of many of those who had been involved in the roundup, expropriation, ghettoization, and deportation of the Jews.

The policies deemed detrimental to the survivors of the Holocaust continued even during the administration of Gyula Horn, a leading figure of the Hungarian Socialist Party.²¹ It was during his tenure (July 15, 1994–July 8, 1998) that the issue of restitution and reparation, virtually overlooked since 1945, finally came to the fore. The Communists, when in power, had ignored the issue almost altogether, citing the requirements of socialist construction. The post-Communist regimes, for their part, became more concerned with the compensation for the victims of Communism than for those of Nazism. To add insult to injury, an indeterminate number of the Christian victims who were compensated for properties nationalized by the Communist regime had, in fact, “legally” or fraudulently acquired them from Jews during the Nazi era.²²

²⁰ See Decision No. 2/1994. (I.14) AB, which was adopted on January 11, 1994, in *Az Alkotmánybíróság határozatai* [Decisions of the Constitutional Court], Budapest, No. 1, 1994, 9–20.

²¹ Horn was one of the leaders of the radical reformers who changed the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party into the Hungarian Socialist Party in 1989. He played a major role in Hungary's transition to democracy.

²² In late 1998, the Orbán government sought to ease the collective conscience of the nation by offering to compensate survivors by paying approximately \$150 for each member of their particular immediate families, assuming that they could prove that their loved ones were in fact victims of the Holocaust. The reparation offer was based on Law XXIX of 1997. The survivors who availed themselves of this offer discovered, after considerable time-consuming paperwork, that even this amount was to be obtained in forints and spent in Hungary. The issue of the heirless and unclaimed property still has not been resolved. As a result of negotiations with the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO), represented by a delegation headed by Moshe Sanbar, and the Hungarian government, represented by István Hiller (who then was minister of education and culture), the Hungarians transferred \$21 million to the Jewish Heritage of Hungary Public Endowment (*Magyarországi Zsidó Örökség Közalapítvány* [MAZSÖK]), as a down payment

It was also during the Horn administration that the historical memory of the Holocaust was subjected to another challenge. A ruling by the Constitutional Court and the many governmental rules and regulations issued during his tenure virtually prohibited many scholars from pursuing their work on the preservation and/or acquisition of archival materials relating to the Holocaust. The “personal data protection” provisions of various legislative acts and judicial decisions, many of which were supported by liberal politicians as well, were plausibly designed to protect public officials who had formerly been associated with either the Nazi-collaborationist or the Communist regime, not surprisingly had the ancillary effect of restricting the Holocaust-related research activities of scholars in general and of foreign nationals in particular.²³ The issue continued to remain unsolved.²⁴

on the value of all heirless and unclaimed, formerly Jewish-owned private property in the country. MAZSÖK, created in 1997, distributed one-third of the amount for the benefit of Holocaust survivors residing in Hungary, while two-thirds of the fund is being distributed and administered by the Claims Conference to assist needy survivors of Hungarian origin residing outside that country. The WJRO is currently in discussions with government officials, primarily János Lázár, regarding the resumption of negotiations relating to remaining open restitution issues. As part of these discussions, in November 2013, WJRO submitted a paper to Hungary reviewing approaches taken by other European countries regarding the restitution of heirless and other unclaimed property. Lázár’s predecessors in these negotiations were István Hiller and András Levente Gál.

²³ For example, see the ruling by the Hungarian Constitutional Court of June 30, 1995, and Decree No. 118/1998 of the Council of Ministers. To cite just one example of the difficulties, access to the archives of the National Central Alien Control Office (KEOKH), which was the agency that was responsible for the roundup and deportation of nearly 18,000 “alien” Jews in the summer of 1941, most of whom were slaughtered near Kamianets-Podilskyi, was reportedly blocked for ninety years.

²⁴ The restrictions continued to be rigidly enforced. The frustration over these restrictions was felt not only by individual scholars but also by world-renowned Holocaust-related archival and research centers such as Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. Miles Lerman, then chairman of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, expressed this frustration in a letter addressed to Prime Minister Orbán on June 17, 1999. Among other things, he stated: “After several rounds of discussions with Hungarian officials and archivists and a series of unfortunate experiences, we have reached the regrettable conclusion that Hungary has failed to cooperate with the Museum in its efforts and stands nearly alone among countries in Europe in its failing to make available its records on the Holocaust.”

The Intensification of the Assault

The assault on historical memory was gradually exacerbated during the first administration of Viktor Orbán (July 8, 1998–May 27, 2002) and took an ominous turn during his next two terms (May 29, 2010–May 11, 2014; June 6, 2014).

Even though Orbán's party, the League of Young Democrats (Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége [FIDESZ]), had won only a narrow parliamentary majority following the elections of May 1998,²⁵ he and his right-of-center coalition government had given a free hand to the history-cleansers dedicated to the rehabilitation of the Horthy era. While reportedly not an antisemite himself, it appears that political expediency has compelled Orbán to condone the activities of the ultra-right and to encourage, if not actually support, those dedicated to cleansing Hungary's wartime history. It was during his first tenure that the history-falsifying technique of "denationalization" gained general acceptance. Using this technique, history-cleansers would, in effect, absolve Hungary of all guilt by transferring exclusive responsibility for the Holocaust onto the Germans. To assure a guilt-free national continuity in Hungary's history, the Orbán administration decided to revitalize the national-Christian values of the Horthy era by reintroducing its national symbols.²⁶ One of the most forceful spokespersons

²⁵ Orbán's Fidesz–Hungarian Civic Union and his coalition partners (i.e., the right-wing rural-based Smallholders' Party led by József Torgyán and the Hungarian Democratic Forum led by Ibolya Dávid) controlled only 213 seats (55 percent) of the total 386 seats in parliament. For some details on antisemitic incidents since the inauguration of the Orbán government, see Marta S. Halpert, "Hungary: A Growing Tolerance for Anti-Semitism," *ADL International Notes*, New York, December 1999.

²⁶ Early in 2000, the Orbán government restored the Royal Crown of St. Stephen as the symbol of the Hungarian state. Overlooking the inherent contradiction between the symbol of a royal crown and Hungary's current democratic, republican form of government, Zsolt Lányi, vice president of the Independent Smallholders' Party and chairman of the parliament's armed services committee, for example, declared that the crown represented "the embodiment of Christian Hungary." The Orbán government also revived the Corvin Prize, the state award introduced by Horthy in 1930. Some nationalists have also called for the restoration of noble titles and knighthood rituals, the honoring of those who fought for the Fascist cause as "heroes," and the renaming of a street in Budapest for Horthy. Alex Bandy, "Hungary Revives Nationalist Symbols," *The Associated Press*, December 14, 1999, and Zoltán Vajda, "Horthyról mégsem neveznek el utat" [There will be no road named for Horthy], *Magyar Hírlap*, Budapest, March 17, 2000.

for the need to return to these values was Ibolya Dávid, Orbán's minister of justice.²⁷

It was also around this time that the history-cleansers appear to have been indirectly encouraged to "reevaluate" or "overlook" the role the Hungarian perpetrators had played in the Final Solution and to focus instead on the "positive" contribution the Christian Hungarians had made to the rescuing of Jews.

As part of their reevaluation drive, history-cleansers expended considerable effort to bring about the absolution of the gendarmerie, which had played a crucial role in the roundup, ghettoization, and deportation of the Jews.²⁸ Toward this end, they produced a documentary that was first shown on Hungarian television in early December 1998.²⁹ The "historians" featured in the documentary were seen in effect to exonerate the gendarmerie not only by placing ultimate responsibility on the Germans but also by focusing on the law-abiding attitude of the Jews. Sándor Szakály, one of the "experts" associated with the documentary, advanced the obscene argument that there was no need for the gendarmerie to use force because the Jews—law-abiding citizens that they were—carried out the anti-Jewish measures of their own volition. Another "expert" advanced the thesis that the gendarmes were, in fact, engaged in a form of resistance by carrying out the anti-Jewish measures "humanely." All of the participants in the documentary appeared to conclude that the gendarmes were guided by the Christian spirit and were highly appreciated by the people they had served for the preservation of law and order. The gendarmes who were interviewed for the documentary—all of whom were veterans

²⁷ Early in November 1999, she declared, among other things, that the "experience of the post-Communist era revealed a great societal need for the representation of Christian-conservative values based on national traditions." For some details on Dávid's activities, see "Antallra emlékezett az MDF: Dávid Ibolya pártelnök a demokrata fórum integrálól szerepéről" [The MDF memorialized Antall: Ibolya Dávid, the party president, on the integrating role of the Democratic Forum], *Népszabadság*, November 1, 1999. During her tenure, Dávid consistently rejected the Jewish leaders' plea for her to initiate legislation making Holocaust-denial punishable.

²⁸ Holocaust survivors' many personal narratives are virtually unanimous in their recollection of the barbaric behavior of the gendarmes during the roundup, expropriation, ghettoization, and deportation of the Jews. For references to these narratives, consult the bibliography listed in note 8.

²⁹ Titled *Hiven, becsülettel, vitézül* (Faithfully, with honor, bravely), the logo of the gendarmerie, the documentary featured a few experts on national security, including Sándor Szakály and József Parádi, who were also involved in its production.

of the anti-Jewish drive—offered a variety of extenuating “explanations” for their own involvement.³⁰ Less than a year later, a plaque honoring the gendarmes who died during the war was unveiled by Zsolt Lányi, head of the Armed Services Committee of the Hungarian parliament, in the courtyard of the Hungarian Institute and Museum of War History (Hadtörténeti Intézet és Múzeum), headed by Szakály.

The escalation in the activities of history-cleansers appears to have been indirectly encouraged by governmental policies that increasingly reflect the “national-Christian” course of the interwar period. Despite its very brief tradition of civil liberties, Hungary had permitted until 2012 at least the dissemination of hate literature³¹ and, until recently, the denial of the Holocaust³²—acts that are deemed illegal and severely punished in France and many other countries with a much longer record of liberal democracy.³³

Ultra-nationalists seem to have been encouraged in history-cleansing activities by the attitude of some of the highest-ranking officials. A few among these have not only expressed sympathy for the objective pursued by many of the cleansers but have also occasionally engaged in such practices themselves. Many among these ultra-nationalists have been associated with

³⁰ Among those featured in the film were Captain István Jáni, the former commander of the gendarmes in the ghetto of Szombathely; First Lieutenant László Radnay and First Lieutenant Mihály Gerencséry, who were convicted for their involvement in the Újvidék massacres in early 1942; First Lieutenant Pál Bugarin-Horváth, who was involved in the ghettoization of Jews in Matészalka; and Sergeant József Szendi, who was deported from the United States for hiding his background and involvement in the anti-Jewish drive.

³¹ In addition to permitting the publication of venomously antisemitic, Holocaust-denying periodicals such as *Hunnia* and *Szent Korona*, the Hungarian authorities also consented to the reissuing of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* (see note 35) and the notorious forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, works that were effectively exploited by the Nazis and their Hungarian accomplices in the drive against the Jews.

³² During the administration of Gordon Bajnai (April 14, 2009–May 29, 2010), the Criminal Code (Büntető Törvénykönyv) was amended by the parliament on February 22, 2010. It provided for the punishment of up to three years’ imprisonment for those denying the Holocaust. The Fidesz members abstained from voting on the amendment that was initiated by Attila Mesterházy.

³³ In January 2013 a Holocaust denier was convicted and sentenced to visit the Holocaust Documentation Center in Budapest at least three times. For some details on the legal issues surrounding Holocaust denial in Hungary, see Antal Attila, “Büntetőjoggal a holokauszttagadás ellen?” [A criminal law against Holocaust denial?], *Jogi Fórum*, 10 March, 2010, <http://www.jogiforum.hu/hirek/22695>.

the neo-Nazi Jobbik Party.³⁴ One of the most brazen attempts to falsify the history of Hungarian Jewry in general and the Holocaust record in particular was a plan that was initiated by the Hungarian Ministry of Culture for a new exhibition in Auschwitz. The idea originated in the fall of 1998 when, during a trip to Poland, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán visited the death camp and found the current exhibit in the Hungarian pavilion—established by the Communist regime in 1979–1980—both “inappropriate and neglected.”

The original plan called merely for the reconstruction of the exhibit, but the experts in the Ministry of Culture subsequently decided to shelve it altogether and create a new one to be opened, with appropriate pomp and ceremony, by the prime minister on May 9, 2000. The ministry entrusted the planning and creation of the new exhibit to the Hungarian National Museum. The head of that museum, Dr. Tibor Kovács, had no problem in finding the “right person” for the job: István Ihász, the chief of the museum’s Contemporary History Division. An unabashed rightist, Ihász had already established his nationalist credentials as the creator of that museum’s highly controversial “Twentieth Century Hungary” exhibit. Still one of the museum’s most popular exhibits, it virtually glorifies the Horthy era and denigrates the tragedy of Hungarian Jewry.

Ihász began working on the new assignment in December 1998, preparing a script and collecting the visual and archival materials he wanted to use in the new pavilion. He pursued his task with the assistance of a committee of three experts: Mária Schmidt, then a counselor to the prime minister; Tamás Stark, an associate of the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences; and József Schweitzer, then the chief rabbi

³⁴ The party, officially known as the Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom (Movement for a Better Hungary), was founded in October 2003 under the leadership of Gábor Vona. While formally decrying some of the activities of this neo-Nazi party, the Orbán government failed to take any meaningful action against the antisemitic agitations by its representatives or followers. On November 26, 2012, for example, Márton Gyöngyösi called on the government to draw up lists of Jews who “pose a national security risk” and on November 3, 2013, he, Reverend Loránt Hegedűs, and other leaders of the party participated in the unveiling of a bronze bust of Miklós Horthy. In another ominous development, in mid-June 2014, the Hungarian Supreme Court (the Curia) overruled a lower court decision that allowed the mass media to refer to Jobbik as a “parliamentary far-right party.” See Efraim Zuroff, “Hungary’s Dangerous Precedent,” *Jerusalem Post*, June 14, 2014. For a thoroughly documented overview of Viktor Orbán’s policies in general and of his condoning of the activities of the antisemitic extremist Jobbik party in particular, see Zoltán Tibori Szabó, “Hungary under the Orbán Regime,” Cluj-Napoca, August 2013. A copy of the manuscript is in possession of this author.

of Hungary. The first draft of the script was finished early in the spring of 1998. Following the experts' input during several consultations, a second draft—dated April 9, 1999, and bearing the names of the three experts—was forwarded to the Ministry of Culture early in June. Convinced that the main purpose of the script was informational rather than educational, Ihász reportedly recommended that no further experts be consulted. The ministry, however, followed a more cautious approach and forwarded the script for evaluation to three well-known historians and museology experts: Szabolcs Szita, the chief historian of the Hungarian Auschwitz Foundation of Budapest; Ilona Radnóti, the historian associated with the Janus Pannonius Museum of Pécs; and Róbert Turán, the head of the Jewish Museum of Budapest. Shocked after a first reading, Turán decided to forward copies of the draft to László Karsai, a leading expert on the Holocaust, and Emil Horn, an expert in museology with many museum exhibits to his credit.

The reaction of all five experts was prompt and virtually unanimous. They individually concluded that the script basically falsified the history of the Jews in Hungary in general and of the Holocaust era in particular, and that it appeared to have a political objective: the rehabilitation of the Horthy era by transferring virtually all responsibility for whatever crimes were committed in Hungary almost exclusively to the Germans. Collectively, the evaluations of Ihász's script exposed not only his shortcomings as a historian but also his apparent political agenda as a museologist. His reputed deficiencies as a historian were revealed by Karsai and four fellow historians in a lengthy collective report dated August 4, 1999; his perceived political objectives and museological shortcomings were demonstrated by Horn, in a lengthy and cogently argued report dated August 6.³⁵

³⁵ The planned exhibit attempted to portray a virtual symbiosis of Hungarian-Jewish life since the emancipation of the Jews in 1867, downplaying the many anti-Jewish manifestations as mere aberrations in an otherwise chivalrous history of Hungary. While focusing attention on the positive aspects of Jewish life in the country, emphasizing the "flourishing" of the Jewish community between 1867 and 1944, the rescue activities of those identified as Righteous, and Horthy's "saving" of the Jews of Budapest, it blamed almost exclusively the Germans for the destruction of the Jews. In connection with the pre-Holocaust era, the planned exhibit failed to deal with various aspects of the anti-Jewish drive, including the antisemitic manifestations of the pre-World War I era; the agitation of the so-called Patriotic Associations; the pogroms by the counterrevolutionary forces during the White Terror; the enactment of ever harsher anti-Jewish laws; the shared responsibility of the Christian churches for reinforcing the climate of antisemitism by approving the adoption of virtually all anti-Jewish measures; the inequities of the forced labor service system; the deportation and subsequent murder of nearly 18,000 "alien" Jews in the

Almost three weeks after these reports were forwarded to the leadership of the Jewish community, the chief rabbi decided to resign from Ihász's committee. Stark, reportedly upset that his name appeared on the second draft of the script without his authorization, informed Mária Schmidt about his displeasure. Only Schmidt, a historian who formerly specialized in Holocaust studies, continued to express her basic satisfaction with the unfortunate script. Ihász, on his part, presumably felt vindicated: on August 20, a national holiday, he received a prestigious state award on the recommendation of the prime minister's office.

The reaction of the official leadership of the Jewish community was prompt and forthright. In a letter dated August 25, 1999, Péter Tordai, the president of the Association of the Jewish Communities of Hungary (Magyarországi Zsidó Hitközségek Szövetsége [Mazsihisz]), informed the Ministry of Culture that in the view of the community the script was unacceptable. He expressed his doubts about whether it was the intention of the Hungarian government to establish a pro-Horthy, Holocaust-denigrating, and covertly antisemitic exhibit in Auschwitz—"the emblematic scene of Nazi genocide and the largest mass grave of Hungarian Jewry." Tordai coupled his bewilderment with a warning: Should Ihász's script, nevertheless, become the basis of the planned exhibit, "it will elicit an international scandal that would extend from Jerusalem to Washington and from Budapest to Berlin."³⁶ Shortly thereafter the exhibit plan was quietly dropped.

summer of 1941; and the mass murder of Jews during the so-called Délvidék raids early in 1942. In connection with the Holocaust, the planned exhibit falsified the historical record by placing exclusive blame on the Germans. The Jewish leaders, as did many others interested in a cooperative resolution of the issue of the new exhibit in Auschwitz, were in favor of authorizing another "team of experts" to prepare a historically accurate and a politically neutral exhibit. Toward this end they hoped to keep the whole affair under cover. But it exploded into the open on September 8, 1999, when the *Népszabadság*, Hungary's most popular daily, revealed the Jewish community's negative reaction to the planned exhibit. Taken aback by the avalanche of critical reviews, officials of the Ministry of Culture recommended that the project be shelved, saving the nation from an international scandal.

³⁶ The Jewish community leaders forwarded a copy of the script for my own evaluation and input. I read it with great personal and professional interest. As a survivor of the Holocaust in Hungary, I was shocked by its tone and content; as a historian, I was disturbed by its clearly political-propagandistic objective. I found it a clearly pro-Horthy apologia designed to sanitize the Nazi era in general and the Hungarians' involvement in the Final Solution in particular. I thought it was especially obscene that the author and his supporters aimed to achieve these objectives through an exhibit in Auschwitz!

In addition to the technique of “denationalization” by which exclusive responsibility for the Holocaust is transferred onto the Germans, the Orbán-supported experts on the national-Christian traditions of Hungary also employed the method of “generalization.” This approach is used by those claiming that the tragedy of the Jews was part and parcel of the general catastrophic consequences of a war in which many others suffered as well. Some among the history-cleansers go so far as to identify the Jews themselves as primarily responsible for their own tragic fate. Others claim that the Holocaust was in fact intentionally brought about by rich Jews who had supported Hitler.³⁷ Still others in this group attempt to absolve the Christian Hungarians from any guilt by blaming the Jewish Councils for the suffering of the Jews.³⁸

Some of the “patriotic” individuals who practice generalization try to mitigate the magnitude of the Holocaust by linking the tragedy of the Jews and the trauma endured by Hungary at Trianon.³⁹ Others attempt to whitewash Hungary’s close alliance with the Nazis, including the fact that their country was the last client to fight alongside Germany until the end of the Second World War, by arguing that the Hungarians had in fact

³⁷ This view is espoused by, among others, Áron Mónus. See his epilogue to the 1996 Hungarian edition of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* (Harcot. Hódmezővásárhely: Interseas Editions, 1996, 366). He reiterated the same views in *Új Magyarország* [New Hungary], Budapest, August 13, 1994, 5. See Karsai, “The Radical Right in Hungary.”

³⁸ This view has been expressed by, among others, István Jáni, who is the former gendarmerie captain in charge of a unit guarding the ghetto of Szombathely. See note 29.

³⁹ This view was aired by then foreign minister Géza Jeszenszky on April 5, 1994, during the opening session of the International Scholars’ Conference in Budapest, “The Holocaust in Hungary: Fifty Years Later.” His comments caused a scandal in the hall as well as in the press. For example, see “Holocaust-konferencia: Kitapsolták a külügyminisztert” [Holocaust conference: Foreign minister shouted down], *Népszabadság* [People’s freedom], Budapest, April 6, 1994; “Az igazság megismeréséért, a lelkek megbékéléséért” [To know the truth and give peace to the spirit], *Esti Hírlap*, Budapest, April 6, 1994, 3; Éva V. Bálint and Éva Cseh, “Holocaust-tanácskozás Budapesten, Jeszenszky—kitapsolt párhuzam” [Holocaust discussion in Budapest, Jeszenszky—Parallelism shouted down], *Magyar Hírlap*, Budapest, April 6, 1994; Sára Szeli, “Holocaust-konferencia Budapesten, Jeszenszky Géza beszédét félbeszakították” [Holocaust conference Budapest, Géza Jeszenszky’s speech interrupted], *Pesti Hírlap*, Budapest, April 6, 1994. For years thereafter, Jeszenszky continued to link the Holocaust to Hungary’s misfortunes at Trianon. See his “Hungary in the Second World War: Tragic Blunders or Destiny?” *Hungarian Review*, Budapest, 5 (March 14, 2014).

been the Third Reich's *last victims* and as such had suffered as much as the Jews, if not more.⁴⁰

Insisting on the commonality of suffering, many history-cleansers promote a "collective" historical memory. They generalize the Holocaust by homogenizing the losses of Jewry with those incurred by the military forces and the civilian population during the war. Toward this end they have erected a large number of monuments, unveiled many plaques, and published many monographs in memory of communal casualties, trans-mogrifying the Holocaust victims into war casualties. The equation of the martyrdom of armed soldiers, who died in the service of their government, and of Christian civilians, who were killed in the wake of the hostilities, with that of the Jews, who were murdered irrespective of their age or sex, is naïve at best and politically motivated at worst. This approach enables history-cleansers to demonstrate that the combined military-civilian casualties incurred by the Christian population during the Second World War far exceeded those suffered by the Jews.⁴¹

Still another technique frequently employed by history-cleansers is that of "trivialization and relativization." Denying the uniqueness of the Holocaust, the destruction of the Jews is viewed as just another chapter in the long history of man's inhumanity to man. The apparent main objective of this group of cleansers is to safeguard Hungary's honor by demonstrating not only that the Holocaust, to the extent that it took place, was in fact preceded by other examples of mass murder (e.g., the massacre of Indians in the Americas and the genocide of the Armenians by the Turks), but also and above all that the destruction of the Jews was

⁴⁰ One of the most vocal representatives of this position has been János Horváth, a rightist member of the Hungarian parliament. He tried to lecture me on the veracity of his position at a meeting with various Hungarian officials, including Zsolt Németh, state secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at the Hungarian consulate general in New York on November 30, 1998.

⁴¹ Many communities in Hungary have erected plaques and monuments honoring locals who lost their lives during the war, listing them alphabetically irrespective of the circumstances of their death. The same approach is followed in many memorial books. For example, see pages 179–536 of Péter Szabó and Ferenc Szily, eds., *Somogy megye a II. világháborúban* [Somogy county in the Second World War] (Kaposvár: A Somogy Megye Levéltár kiadása, 1993), for which Sándor Szakály wrote the introduction and served as editorial consultant, contain the listing of the wartime casualties by communities. With this approach, which amalgamates Jewish and non-Jewish casualties into a single category, the number of Christian victims is almost three times as high as that of the Jews killed during the Holocaust: soldiers, 5,916; civilians, 4,498; Jews, 3,539.

dwarfed in scope and magnitude by the atrocities committed by Communist regimes the world over. In this context, many in this group also argue that the Jewish suffering, like that of many other ethnic-national groups, was war related.⁴²

During the first Orbán administration, the nationalists engaged in cleansing the Horthy era have found, in addition to Szakály, a new ally—Dr. Mária Schmidt. A rising young scholar in Holocaust studies during the Communist era, Dr. Schmidt changed her original academic ambitions soon after the systemic change of 1989. She appears to have adopted the “nationalist” reinterpretation of Hungary’s history after World War I, shifting her interest to the unmasking of the crimes of the Communist era. This soon proved to be a somewhat problematic undertaking in a country in which Communism has been claimed by sundry antisemites since 1919 to be Jewish in origin and character. One may wonder whether Dr. Schmidt may have concluded—as did many other nationalists—that by unmasking the crimes of the Soviet-dominated Communist regimes in general and those perpetrated by the Hungarian Communists in particular, she might not only help mitigate unfavorable perceptions of major perpetrators of the Holocaust but also contribute to the defense of the domestic and foreign policies of Horthy’s Hungary. While the unmasking of the crimes committed by the Communists is clearly legitimate, its motivation is also potentially dangerous in countries where the ideology and practice of Communism are often identified with the Jews. Whatever her motivations, she emerged as a vociferous advocate of the idea that the same yardsticks must be used in the assessment of the Nazi and Communist-type totalitarian regimes and of the crimes for which they were responsible.⁴³ By mechanically applying this methodology, Schmidt, like many among some ideologically oriented colleagues, seems to overlook the

⁴² Champions of this group argue, among other things, that the suffering of the Jews was due to the fact that they had sided with the Allies and actually participated in revolts in many ghettos and concentration camps. For example, see István Lovas, “Összehasonlító véralgebra és a holocaust” [Comparative blood algebra and the Holocaust], *Népszabadság*, Budapest, March 5, 1999, 10.

⁴³ On April 17–18, 1994, at the London conference on the Holocaust, for example, Mária Schmidt was virtually shouted down by members of the audience when it appeared to many that she was trying to “prove” that the postwar Communist regime in Hungary was more oppressive than the pro-Nazi Sztójay government. Her paper was excluded from the volume dealing with the conference (David Cesarani, ed., *Genocide and Rescue: The Holocaust in Hungary, 1944* [Oxford: Berg, 1997]).

many historical, socioeconomic, and moral factors that differentiate these totalitarian regimes, correctly concluding that in terms of numbers the crimes committed by the Communists the world over far exceeded those perpetrated by the Nazis.⁴⁴ Among the crimes and injustices committed by the Communists, she also includes many of the verdicts of the People's Courts of the immediate postwar period.⁴⁵

Dr. Schmidt caused a considerable political uproar in early November 1999 when she spoke extensively before a largely rightist group on an accustomed theme: the supposed use of two yardsticks in the evaluation of Nazi and Communist crimes. She expressed profound disappointment that only the Holocaust of the Jews was being recalled in connection with World War II. In her view, the idea that the Holocaust was unique and indisputable was being advanced and propagated by a segment of the intelligentsia who dominated the mass media, whereas, in fact, "the Holocaust, the extermination or rescue of the Jews represented but a secondary,

⁴⁴ Supporters of this argument rely for documentation on Stéphane Courtois et al., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). In a controversial speech (see note 44), Ms. Schmidt emphasized that while the Communist regimes were responsible for nearly 100 million victims, the Nazis killed only about 25 million. In this context, see also some of her essays in her *Diktatúrák ördögszekerén* [In the devil's cauldron of dictatorships] (Budapest: Magvető, 1998).

⁴⁵ Within a few years after the systemic change of 1989, she emerged as a crusader for the rehabilitation of former prime minister László Bárdossy, who was executed for war crimes in 1946. For example, see her "Az első kirakatper" [The first show trial], *ibid.*, 217–30. The article was first read as a paper at the Vienna Conference of November 2–5, 1995, held under the sponsorship of the Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen. This writer took pains to remind her and the audience that the former prime minister was not only the "statesman" she basically portrayed him to be but also the man during whose relatively brief tenure as head of government (April 4, 1941–March 7, 1942), Hungary among other things declared war first on the Soviet Union and then the Western Allies; adopted the Nuremberg-type Third Anti-Jewish Law; aggravated the status of the Jewish labor servicemen; rounded up nearly 18,000 so-called "alien" Jews, who were deported and subsequently murdered near Kamianets-Podilskyi; and massacred more than 3,300 men, women, and children in and around Újvidék. György Dancsecs, a top-ranking leader of István Csurka's neo-Fascist Hungarian Justice and Life Party in Budapest, launched an initiative in late October 1999 for the retrial and possible rehabilitation of the former prime minister (*Népszabadság*, October 22, 1999). A month later, the initiative for the judicial rehabilitation of Bárdossy was publicly endorsed by Csurka himself (Michael Shafir, "Radical Politics in East-Central Europe," *RFE/RL East European Perspectives* 2.2 [January 26, 2000], 6).

marginal point of view not among the war aims of either belligerent.”⁴⁶ The reaction of the Jewish community leaders and many intellectuals was immediate and caustic. In a press release, the Jewish leaders characterized Ms. Schmidt as “the best Hungarian student of Jean-Marie Le Pen,” the French far-right leader who referred to the Holocaust as a “detail” of history.⁴⁷ Others questioned her historical analysis and intellectual integrity.⁴⁸ Still others expressed disapproval of her activities as head of the newly established and financially well-endowed Twentieth Century Institute.⁴⁹ The numerous protests and criticisms notwithstanding, she has continued to play an influential role because of the support she receives from various nationalists and, above all, because she continued to enjoy the confidence and support of the prime minister.⁵⁰

Many Hungarian history-cleansers have taken Schmidt’s anti-Communist crusade a step further. Counterbalancing the accounts of the Holocaust, they concentrate on and emphasize almost exclusively the crimes perpetrated by the Communists. Identifying Communism and Bolshevism as Jewish in origin and character, these historical revisionists insist that the

⁴⁶ Ms. Schmidt’s talk was given under the auspices of the Eckhardt Tibor Political Academy (Eckhardt Tibor Politikai Akadémia) at the headquarters of the Independent Smallholders’ Party (Független Kisgazdapárt). For the text of the talk, see Mária Schmidt, “Holokausztok a huszadik században” [Holocausts in the twentieth century], *Magyar Hírlap*, Budapest, November 13, 1999.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ For example, see Tamás Gáspár Miklós, “Sírrablok és halottgyalázók” [Grave robbers and vilifiers of the dead], *ibid.*, November 16, 1999, and Sándor Kopátsy, “Holocaust csak egy volt” [There was only one Holocaust], *ibid.*, November 23, 1999.

⁴⁹ In this capacity and with a huge budget at her disposal, some people believe that Ms. Schmidt reportedly has the power to determine which historians and projects will receive state funding. For further details, see Michael J. Jordan, “Hungary Whitewashes Its Murky Past,” *Jerusalem Report* 10.23 (March 13, 2000), 30–31. According to many reports, Schmidt has also been exerting considerable influence on shaping media policy. Some details about her role in this area were revealed in the March 2, 2000, judgment of the Central Regional Court of Pest (Pesti Központi Kerületi Bíróság) in a libel case she initiated—and lost—against the *Magyar Hírlap*. For the text of the judgment, see *Magyar Hírlap*, Budapest, April 6, 2000.

⁵⁰ See “Orbán bízik Schmidt Máriában” [Orbán has confidence in Mária Schmidt], *Népszabadság*, November 17, 1999. Among the nationalist-rightist organizations that expressed support for Schmidt’s activities is the Történelmi Igazságtétel Bizottság (Committee for Historical Justice). See *ibid.*

wartime suffering of the Jews was matched, if not actually exceeded, by the pain the Jews supposedly inflicted upon the Christian world during the Communist era.⁵¹ This was particularly the case during the Stalinist period when, in their view, “the Jews” exploited their power to avenge the suffering they had endured during the Holocaust. In parliamentary debates and other public forums, even some politicians in power occasionally feel impelled to remind their compatriots of the Jewish factor during the Soviet era by selectively identifying former Communist leaders by their original Jewish names.⁵²

Another ploy in this context is the tendency to equate Auschwitz with the Gulag, “balancing” the suffering of the Jews with that endured by Hungarian POWs and other political prisoners in Soviet camps. Borrowing a page from their counterparts elsewhere, some Hungarian revisionists claim that Auschwitz was modeled on the Gulag, revealing their ignorance or intentional misrepresentation of the fundamental differences

⁵¹ Antisemites and ultra-nationalists continuously emphasize that most of the leaders of the short-lived proletarian dictatorship of 1919 were “Jews,” overlooking the fact that these Communists of Jewish origin were in reality “marginalized internationalists” whose class-oriented social and economic policies hurt the Jewish community even more than they did the Christian society. Of course, these antisemites also predictably fail to note that the counterrevolutionary forces that succeeded the proletarian dictatorship killed many more human beings—Jews and non-Jews alike—than the Communists. As for the postwar Communist era, they also fail to note that the Communist Party of Hungary had more than 800,000 members in the late 1980s, among whom the percentage of Jews was relatively small (the total Hungarian Jewish population was only around 90,000). Moreover, the top leadership of the party, like its membership in general, consisted overwhelmingly of ethnic Hungarians, the Jews having been largely purged in the wake of the anti-Zionist and antic cosmopolitan campaign that began during the Stalinist era.

⁵² A notorious example of this was the comment by Ágnes G. Nagyné Maczó, a representative of the Smallholder’s Party and one of the vice presidents of the Hungarian parliament. During a speech on March 17, 1997, the former member of the right-of-center Hungarian Democratic Forum reminded Imre Szekeres, the leader of the Hungarian Socialist Party faction, that his predecessor was “the Hungarian-hating Manó Roth,” which was a clear reference to Mátyás Rákosi, the Stalinist leader of Jewish origin. Ignoring the fact that Rákosi was perhaps an even greater Jew-hater, the parliamentary vice president clearly did not even know that Rákosi’s original name was Rosenfeld. For some details on this incident, see Péter Regős, “Zsidózó ’56-os vendég” [An antisemitic guest of the generation of ’56], *Menóra*, Toronto, October 3–10, 1997.

in the operation and objectives of the Nazi death camps and the Soviet penal establishments.⁵³

The campaign for the rehabilitation of the Horthy era, coupled with the drive to falsify the history of the Holocaust, gained momentum during Prime Minister Orbán's second term of office and continued unabatedly during his third. Emboldened by the landslide victories of his party in the parliamentary elections of April 2010 and April 2014,⁵⁴ Orbán provided both the legal framework and the political directives for the successful pursuit of this campaign. The legal façade for his grand design was provided by the following provision of the preamble to the new constitution that was adopted on April 25, 2011:

We date the restoration of our country's self-determination, lost on the nineteenth day of March 1944, from the second day of May 1990, when the first freely elected organ of popular representation was formed. We shall consider this date to be the beginning of our country's new democracy and constitutional order.

By this constitutional provision, the Orbán government appears to pursue two major objectives: to establish a historical continuity between the Hungarian state of the Horthy era and the Hungarian state of the post-Communist period and to convince the world that Hungary had lost its

⁵³ Horrible and murderous as the Soviet Gulag camps were, the inmates were overwhelmingly political and performed tasks deemed useful by the Soviet state. These history-cleansers ignore the fact that, unlike the Jews deported to Auschwitz, the Gulag inmates, identified as "enemies of the people," were allowed to receive mail, food packages, medical care, and occasionally visits during the period of their incarceration. While millions of Gulag inmates died or were killed during the seventy-year history of the Soviet Union, their entire families were not automatically subjected to genocidal treatment as were the Jews during the Holocaust. For a balanced overview of the basic differences between Auschwitz and the Gulag, see Steven T. Katz, *The Holocaust and Comparative History* (New York: Leo Baeck Institute, 1993), 18–25.

⁵⁴ In the elections of April 11 and April 25, 2010, his Fidesz–Hungarian Civic Union and its coalition partner, the Christian Democratic People's Union (KDNP), won 261 seats, constituting a supermajority of 67.88 percent. The extremist neo-Nazi party, Jobbik (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom [Movement for a Better Hungary]), obtained 47 seats (12.18 percent), emerging as the third-largest party represented in the Hungarian parliament. In the elections of April 6, 2014, Fidesz–Hungarian Civic Union and its partner won 133 of the 199 seats, the Unity opposition group 38 seats, and Jobbik 23 seats.

sovereignty in the wake of the beginning of the German occupation and, as a victim itself, was and is not responsible for the subsequent destruction of the Jews. By using this big lie technique, Orbán and the history-cleansers he supports have proceeded to erase the historical fact that the German occupiers were well-received by most Hungarians, civilians and the military alike. They seem to obfuscate the fact that the occupation took place without any resistance in the wake of a Horthy–Hitler agreement at Schloss Klessheim (March 18–19, 1944), that the Hungarian army and the law-enforcement agencies continued to serve the Axis war effort, and that the Horthy-appointed government placed the instruments of state power—the gendarmerie, police, and civil service—at the disposal of those in charge of the Final Solution—while he, the regent, continued to represent the sovereignty of the nation as head of state.

The Hungarian history-cleansers could not, in the age of the Internet while Hungary is a member of NATO and the European Union, deny the realities of the catastrophe that befell the Hungarian Jews. As a result, concurrent with blaming exclusively the Germans for the Holocaust, they are engaged in covering up Hungary’s involvement by focusing on the “positive” aspects of its history—the help Hungarians had provided for the Jews since 1867 in general and during the Second World War in particular. In connection with the latter, the history-cleansers usually have focused on the protection of labor servicemen following the beginning of the German occupation, the rescue activities of the Righteous, and the saving of the Jews of Budapest.

It is true that the Jewish labor servicemen were, with a few exceptions, exempted from the ghettoization and deportation measures and had the “protection” of the armed forces, which continued to exercise exclusive jurisdiction over the labor service system even after the beginning of the German occupation. It is also true that quite a number of military commanders recruited “strong-looking” Jewish men from within the ghettos in order to save them from deportation and almost certain death—still another indication of their awareness of the realities of the anti-Jewish drive. The history-cleansers fail to deal with the basically discriminatory nature of the system and the horrors to which many of the labor servicemen were subjected along the Soviet front lines, in the copper mines of Serbia, and during the Nyilas era.⁵⁵ A few well-known “patriotic” historians, including Sándor

⁵⁵ For details, see Robert Rozett, *Conscripted Slaves: Hungarian Jewish Forced Laborers on the Eastern Front during the Second World War* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2013). On the fate of Jewish labor servicemen during the Nyilas era, see Braham, *Politics*, 357–360.

Szakály, went so far as to describe the labor service system as quite equitable, emphasizing that the treatment of the Jewish labor servicemen was tolerable, and that their losses were far fewer than generally claimed.⁵⁶

In accordance with the guidelines originally formulated by former prime minister József Antall, Jr., the history-cleansers, like many among the “respectable” governmental and political leaders of contemporary Hungary, have tried to deflect attention from the Hungarians’ involvement in the Holocaust by focusing attention on the rescue activities of the relatively few Christians who had been identified by Yad Vashem as Righteous among the Nations. This politically directed overemphasis on the Righteous, in the absence of the historical context of the Final Solution, is presumably designed to inculcate in the postwar generations the belief that the practitioners of righteous conduct, rather than the perpetrators, were the dominant elements of the Holocaust era.⁵⁷

One of the major arguments used by the history-cleansers in their drive to rehabilitate the Horthy era has been the regent’s July 6, 1944, decision to halt the deportations and thereby save the Jews of Budapest.⁵⁸ While this is basically true, history-cleansers fail to identify the

⁵⁶ Tamás Stark, Péter Szabó, and Sándor Szakály, “Második világháború: A magyar munkaszolgálat” [The Second World War: The Hungarian Labor Service], *Magyar Nemzet* [Hungarian nation], Budapest, February 20, 1992, and February 28, 1992. In rebuttal, see Randolph L. Braham, “Nyugtalanító gyakorlatok Magyarországon a Holocausztal kapcsolatban” [Disturbing research practices on the Holocaust in Hungary], *Menóra*, Toronto, May 29, 1992, 3–4.

⁵⁷ See also Rabbi Marvin Hier, “Remembrance Needs to Emphasize Villains, Not Heroes,” *Martyrdom and Resistance*, New York, March–April 1995, 12. A relevant example of this possible conclusion is based on a personal experience I had in Budapest in September 1997. I found that all of the graduating students of the Jewish High School were acquainted with the wartime activities of Raoul Wallenberg, but none of them had any recollection of ever having heard or read anything about László Endre or László Baký. Since these students were completely unaware of the key role that these high-ranking Hungarian officials had played in the destruction of the Jews, one can assume that the same students were basically ignorant of the Holocaust in general. If this is the case with students graduating from the *Jewish High School* in Budapest, one can surmise the level of Holocaust awareness on the part of Christian students in the capital, let alone in the countryside.

⁵⁸ Sándor Püski, a publisher and book dealer, went even further, claiming that the Horthy regime entered World War II to save the Hungarian Jews and could not end the alliance with Hitler for the same reason. For some details on this outlandish position, see Ivan Berend, “‘Jobbra át! [Right face!]’: Right-Wing Trends in Post-Communist Hungary,” in *Democracy and Right-Wing Politics in Eastern Europe in the 1990s*, ed. Joseph Held (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1993), 127–28.

political and military factors that induced Horthy to act at a time when all of Hungary, with the notable exception of the capital, already had been made *judenrein*. They also fail to acknowledge Horthy's own responsibility for the liquidation of the provincial Jewish communities. He did so by consenting, during his March 18, 1944, meeting with Hitler at Schloss Klessheim, to the delivery of hundreds of thousands of Jews "for labor in Germany."⁵⁹ After constitutionally appointing his new pro-German government, he decided not to be involved in Jewish matters, thereby giving a free hand to those involved in the Final Solution program.⁶⁰ The argument advanced by Edmund Veessenmayer, the Führer's former plenipotentiary in Hungary, is quite persuasive. In his testimony at the 1946 war crimes trial of the so-called "deportation trio"—Andor Jaross, László Endre, and László Baký—Veessenmayer declared that Horthy, who as head of state, had demonstrated his ability to halt the deportations at a particular time could have prevented their initiation in the first place—had he really wanted to do so.⁶¹ Horthy's champions also overlook the fact that credit for the rescuing of the Jews of Budapest has also been claimed by or attributed to many others, including the commander of the troops who foiled an anti-Horthy coup early in July 1944.⁶²

As part of the drive to focus attention on the Righteous, the Orbán government decided to celebrate Raoul Wallenberg's centenary in 2012

⁵⁹ It was partially this agreement that the perpetrators exploited as the "legal" basis for their drive against the Jews. Cynically arguing that the Jewish workers would be happier with their loved ones with them, the Hungarian law-enforcement officials proceeded, in accordance with directives received from the Ministry of the Interior, to round up all Jews in the countryside irrespective of their age, sex, or medical status.

⁶⁰ Braham, *Politics*, 393, 397–401.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 1063–64.

⁶² While mythmakers operating at opposite ends of the political spectrum also claim credit for Heinrich Himmler and Raoul Wallenberg, very few find it politically fashionable to acknowledge the decisive role that the Red Army played in the liberation of the Jews. The chief spokesman for Himmler's alleged role in rescuing the Jews of Budapest is SS-Sturmabführer Wilhelm Höttl (Walter Hagen), former head of the Intelligence Service of the Security Service in Vienna (which covered Hungary). See his interview in Péter Bokor's *Végjáték a Duna mentén* [Endgame along the Danube] (Budapest: RTV-Minerva-Kossuth, 1982), 192. See also Braham, *Politics*, 939, note 152, as well as his "Rescue Operations in Hungary: Myths and Realities," in *Yad Vashem Studies*, Vol. 32, ed. David Silberklang (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2004), 21–57.

by organizing a series of commemorative events both at home and abroad. One of these events was planned for New York.⁶³ Among the many events organized in Budapest, one featured Kati Marton, the well-known Hungarian-born author of a book on Wallenberg, focusing on his disappearance in the Soviet Union. In an interview following her lecture, she claimed that Wallenberg “was in fact a *Hungarian* hero... who was honored because he had in fact saved *Hungarians* in Budapest” (emphasis added).⁶⁴ Presumably designed to please her official hosts, these claims were properly rebuffed by those interested in protecting the historical integrity of the Holocaust era.⁶⁵ The commemoration of the centenary of Raoul Wallenberg, one of the first rescuers to be identified by Yad Vashem as a Righteous among the Nations, provided an opportunity to highlight the rescue activities of the Hungarian Righteous—all diverting attention from Hungary’s involvement in the Holocaust.

The drive to bring about the rehabilitation of the Horthy era continued to be pursued along seemingly two conflicting paths: the encouragement of activities relating to the revitalization of the national-Christian spirit of the interwar period and the commemoration of its national heroes concurrent with the adoption of some policies relating to the Holocaust. Along the former path, the Orbán government consented to, if not actually encouraged, the renaming of streets and the erection of statues for Horthy in many parts of the country and condoned the “positive” reevaluation of notorious antisemites such as the writers Albert Wass and József Nyíró, and Bishop Ottokár Prohászka.

Along the second path, the Orbán government adopted a number of positive measures relating to the commemoration of the Holocaust. It was during his first administration that April 16 was designated as

⁶³ At a lunch at the Hungarian consulate in New York on November 28, 2011, Consul General Károly Dán revealed his plans for such a commemoration, inviting me to get involved. While aware of the government’s intentions, I submitted some ideas, which were considered with reservation. I suggested, among other things, to synchronize the event in conjunction with an address on Wallenberg that I already had prepared as part of the Fall 2012 lecture series of the Institute for Holocaust Studies at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. The Consul General informed the Hungarian Foreign Ministry accordingly (*Új Élet*, May 15, 2012).

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ See, for example, László Bartus, “Tollhegy,” *Amerikai Magyar Népszava/Szabad-ság*, New York, June 1, 2012.

the day of remembrance of the Hungarian chapter of the Holocaust.⁶⁶ It also supports the Holocaust Documentation Center (HDC),⁶⁷ which was established on July 1, 2002, and inaugurated on April 16, 2004, under the auspices of Prime Minister Péter Medgyessy (May 27, 2002–September 29, 2004).⁶⁸ As a state agency, the HDC depends almost exclusively on the financial support of the government. As a result, its leaders, such as the members of the board of directors (Kuratórium), appear not to be totally free and independent in determining the agenda of their research and other activities. They had managed, so far at least, to retain relatively intact the permanent exhibition that was organized during the Medgyessy era, and this in spite of occasional public criticism by high officials of the Orbán government. In 2011, for example, they were subjected to an attack by András Levente Gál, then state secretary in the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice (Közigazgatási és Igazságügyi Minisztérium)—an official with jurisdiction over the Memorial Center. Gál, a nonhistorian nationalist politician, had publicly objected to some aspects of the Center's permanent exhibition. He was particularly angered by the correlation he had found between Hungary's territorial acquisitions between 1938 and 1941 and the Holocaust, and he reportedly suggested that appropriate changes be effectuated in the exhibition. The suggestion aroused vocal protests in Hungary and elsewhere, forcing Gál to retreat. In addition to Gál, Cardinal Péter Erdő, the archbishop of Esztergom, objected to the placement of a portrait of

⁶⁶ It was on April 16, 1944, the last day of Passover, that the roundup and ghettoization of the Jews of Carpatho-Ruthenia and northeastern Hungary began. The date establishing the Memorial Day for the Victims of the Holocaust in Hungary (Holokauszt Magyarországi Áldozatainak Emléknapja) was set by the National Assembly (Országgyűlés) on January 18, 2000, and was first observed by high school students on April 16, 2001.

⁶⁷ The Center is often also referred to as the Holocaust Memorial Center (Holokauszt Emlékközpont).

⁶⁸ The Holocaust Memorial Center, officially known as the Holocaust Documentation Center and Public Foundation for Memorial Collection (Holocaust Dokumentációs Központ és Emlékgyűjtemény Közalapítvány), is the successor organization of the Hungarian Auschwitz Foundation (Magyar Auschwitz Alapítvány), a private organization that was established in 1990 by a historian (Szabolcs Szita) and two survivors of the Holocaust (László November and Gábor Verő).

the antisemitic Ottokár Prohászka, the bishop of Székesfehérvár, next to that of Hitler.⁶⁹

One of the major conflicts between the remnant Jewish community and the successive Hungarian governments during the seventy years following the Holocaust has revolved around the issue of responsibility. In contrast to the leaders of many states in former Nazi-dominated Europe, those of Hungary so far have lacked the courage to confront the Holocaust openly and honestly. In the course of the past few decades, quite a number of officials, including heads of state and members of the various successive governments have expressed sorrow and even apologized for the tragedy that befell Hungarian Jewry.⁷⁰ These expressions of contrition usually have been made during official national or international commemorative events, especially those organized by Jewish or democratically oriented civic organizations. The hopes of the surviving remnant of Hungarian Jewry that one day the leaders of the government and state will—in an official address to the nation recorded in the National Gazette—admit responsibility and perhaps even apologize, however belatedly, for the Hungarians' involvement in the destruction of their fellow citizens of Jewish faith have virtually

⁶⁹ Ági Dömötör, “‘Van-e itt gerinc?’ Interjú a Holokauszt Emlékközpont igazgatójával” [Is there a backbone here? An interview with the director of the Holocaust Memorial Center], *Origo*, Budapest, June 28, 2011, <http://www.origo.hu/kultura/20110628-interju-szita-szabolcs-a-holokauszt-emlekkozpont-megbizott-igazgato.html>, and “Ne szűnjünk meg remélni—Prohászka Emlékkonferencia” [Don’t lose hope—Prohászka Memorial Conference], Székesfehérvár Megyei Jogú Város website, April 7, 2011, http://onkormanyzat.szekesfehervar.hu/index.php?pg=news_82132. For background on the issue, see Gábor Czene, “A szent életű püspök antiszemitizmusa” [The antisemitism of the Holy Bishop], *Népszabadság Online*, December 12, 2012, <http://nol.hu/belfold/lap-20081212-20081212-19-312727>.

⁷⁰ Among the most moving expressions of sorrow over the Holocaust during the past few years were those by Deputy Prime Minister Tibor Navracsics and Foreign Minister János Martonyi during the October 1–2, 2013, conference on Jewish life and antisemitism organized by the Tom Lantos Institute. For the text, see *Múlt és Jövő* 3 (2013): 6–10. Similar sentiments were expressed by Csaba Kőrösi, Hungary’s ambassador to the United Nations, and by President János Áder on the occasion of International Holocaust Remembrance Day (January 27, 2014). It was in the same vein that János Lázár, the state secretary in charge of the Prime Minister’s Office, spoke on the same occasion at the UNESCO in Paris on January 28, 2014. An especially moving talk was given by Hungary’s president, János Áder, on April 28, 2014, at the March of the Living memorial event at the former Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp.

faded.⁷¹ Ironically, they were shattered by the very measures the Orbán government had initiated for the remembrance of that tragedy.

Early in 2013, the Orbán government decided to make 2014 the year for the commemoration of the seventieth anniversary of the Holocaust in Hungary. Toward this end, it brought about the establishment of a “2014 Memorial Committee on the Holocaust in Hungary” (Magyar Holokauszt–2014 Emlékbizottság).⁷² It was placed under the leadership of János Lázár, a state secretary in charge of the prime minister’s office—a controversial political figure whose previous activities raised a number of agonizing questions about his suitability for the job. In June 2010, for example, Lázár, then mayor of Hódmezővásárhely, unveiled a statue honoring Albert Wass, a Hungarian writer who, in 1946, was convicted for war crimes by a people’s court in Romania.

Following the first organizational meeting of the Committee, which came into existence on January 1, 2013, Lázár attempted to disarm his critics by publicly stating, among other things:

2014 must be the year for facing up to the fact and for apologizing.... Facing up to the fact denotes a command for remembrance and under law, a prohibition of forgetting; we must make the apology a part of our national identity.... The remembrance year must be the time for the national facing up to the Holocaust and for apologizing rather than the time for individual or intellectual confrontations and apologies.... We owe an apology to the victims; the Hungarian state was guilty during the Holocaust. Doubly guilty: first, because it failed to save its own citizens from destruction and, second, because it assisted and provided instruments of power for the genocide.⁷³

Lázár’s statement was originally welcomed by those who were interested in setting the Holocaust-related historical record straight; others were more skeptical not only because of the anti-democratic policies of the Orbán-led

⁷¹ Such an apology is implicitly even “prohibited” under the provisions of the current “Orbán constitution.”

⁷² Among those who were invited to participate were representatives of the various Jewish organizations, of the Christian churches, various ministers, the president of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and the ambassadors of Austria, Germany, Israel, and the United States.

⁷³ *Új Élet*, Budapest, February 1, 2013.

government, but also and primarily because it has condoned the glaringly antisemitic and racist policies and activities of several extremist political parties and movements. As the events of the “2014 commemorative year” unfolded, it appears that the objectives emphasized in Lázár’s statement have unfortunately been proven both unrealized and politically motivated.

To assist the work of the 2014 Memorial Committee, the government created a Civic Fund of 1.5 billion forints (approximately 6.8 million US dollars) for the support of civil and municipal initiatives and commemorative program proposals. Shortly after the deadline of November 15, 2013, hundreds of proposals submitted by Jewish community organizations, branches of the Christian churches, cultural institutions, and individuals were reviewed and ranked by the Hungarian parliament’s Commission for Culture and Media.⁷⁴

The government’s Holocaust commemoration plans were not universally applauded. Some argued that, given the political climate in the country and the dire economic conditions with high levels of unemployment, the allocation of such funds for the remembrance of the Holocaust might only stoke the fire of antisemitism and could be better used for helping the needy. Many others expressed their suspicion that the grandiose remembrance program had been designed to detract attention from the government’s intentions to “denationalize” the Holocaust by transferring exclusive responsibility onto the Germans and concurrently to rehabilitate the Horthy era.

One of the most controversial projects in the government’s commemoration plans was a decision to transform the former Józsefvárosi Railway Station into a museum honoring the children who were murdered during the Holocaust.⁷⁵ Early in July 2013, the Orbán government authorized

⁷⁴ The Civic Fund was created under the provisions of Decision No. 1688/2013 of September 30, 2013, and implemented under the provisions of Paragraph 68 of Decree 368/2011. (XII. 31.) Korm. Applications were invited not only from organizations and individuals in Hungary but also from those in the Successor States (Croatia, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia), portions of whose territories were part of Hungary during the Holocaust. The list of the award recipients was published in the middle of December 2013. By early 2014, the government had added an additional 300 million forints to the Civic Fund.

⁷⁵ The idea of transforming the defunct station into a Holocaust-related museum originated with Szabolcs Szita, the director of the Holocaust Memorial Center. His idea was to use the museum as an education center in honor of Raoul Wallenberg (Raoul Wallenberg Európai Emlékhely és Oktatási Központ [The Raoul Wallenberg European Memorial and Education Center]).

the building of such a museum to be named “House of Fates–European Education Center” (Sorsok Háza–Európai Oktatási Központ).⁷⁶ To the dismay of many, the government entrusted Mária Schmidt, the controversial founder and director of the House of Terror (Terror Háza), with the realization of the new museum plans. As the spiritus rector and director of the House of Terror, Schmidt has, in the view of many historians, used this richly funded institution to denigrate and minimize the Holocaust and emphasize the crimes that had been committed during the Communist era.⁷⁷ Following her new assignment, Schmidt, assured of a large budgetary allocation, soon established an International Advisory Body (Nemzetközi Tanácsadó Testület [NTT]) that included a number of reputable individuals, including a few scholars and several leaders of the Jewish community.⁷⁸ The appointment of Schmidt to build and lead a Holocaust-related museum aroused the ire not only of the official leaders of Hun-

⁷⁶ The name reportedly was selected to counteract the impact the Nobel laureate Imre Kertész had had with his autobiographical novel *Sorstalanság* (Fatelessness).

⁷⁷ For further details about Schmidt’s history-cleansing activities, see László Karsai, “A történészek felelőssége (Válasz Gerő Andrásnak a Sorsok Háza ügyében)” [The responsibility of historians (Response to András Gerő regarding the House of Fates)] *Magyar Narancs*, Budapest, 26 (October 23, 2014), 43: 41–42.

⁷⁸ The first organizational meeting of the NTT was held on September 30, 2013, with the participation of György Haraszti; Professor Gabriel Gorodetsky, an Oxford University historian; Professor Muravchik of Johns Hopkins University; Professor Michael Wolffsohn of Munich; Anne Applebaum, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist; János Szász, a film producer-director; Annette Lantos, the late congressman Tom Lantos’s widow; Yehudit Shendar and Chava Baruch, as representatives of Yad Vashem; András Heisler, the president of Mazsihisz; and Rabbi Andrew Baker, the director of International Jewish Affairs of the American Jewish Committee. Sara Bloomfield, the director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, politely declined Mária Schmidt’s personal invitation to participate in the NTT. Paul Shapiro, the director of the Museum’s Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, also refused an invitation proffered by Hungary’s deputy foreign minister, Zsolt Németh, during a visit to Washington. Ms. Bloomfield reportedly suggested that instead of building a new Józsefvárosi museum, the authorities should support more generously the Holocaust Documentation Center already in existence in Budapest. Heisler resigned from the International Advisory Committee on March 5, 2014, and Yad Vashem announced its withdrawal on March 19, 2014.

garian Jewry but also of many individuals familiar with her professional background.⁷⁹

Another development that cast a foreboding shadow on the Orbán government's history-cleansing plans was the inauguration of a new institute on January 2, 2014—at the very start of the highly publicized Holocaust remembrance year. Named VERITAS Research Institute for History (VERITAS Történetkutató Intézet), the new institute is envisioned “to strengthen national awareness” by restudying and presumably rewriting Hungary's history of the past 150 years in a “genuinely multidisciplinary” fashion.⁸⁰ To carry out this “historically important patriotic task,” the institute was placed under the leadership of Dr. Sándor Szakály, a historian who had already distinguished himself as a defender of the wartime activities of the Hungarian gendarmerie and as a minimizer of the plight of the Jewish labor servicemen. Shortly after his appointment, Szakály demonstrated his history-cleansing qualifications for his appointment by reinterpreting two horrific events of the Nazi era. He first tried to “prove” that the fire that killed hundreds of labor servicemen at Doroshich in late April 1943 was caused by the Jews themselves.⁸¹ On another occasion his portrayal minimized the roundup and deportation of approximately 18,000 “alien” Jews, most of whom were subsequently murdered near Kamianets-Podilskyi in the summer of 1941, as merely a police raid against those who

⁷⁹ See her characterization above. See also László Karsai's “Schmidt Mária és a holokauszt” [Mária Schmidt and the Holocaust], *Népszabadság*, Budapest, February 19, 2014.

⁸⁰ According to many sources, one of Orbán's chief advisers on VERITAS and the entire history-cleansing campaign is Péter Boross, a former prime minister. By authorizing and financing VERITAS, one is led to conclude that the Orbán government had lost confidence in the competence and scholarly activities of the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. See, among others, Gábor Czene's “Megszállástól megszállásig: a politika kiállt a veritas mellett” [From occupation to occupation: Politics in support of VERITAS], <http://nol.hu/belfold/a-politika-kiallt-a-veritas-mellett-1489457>.

⁸¹ Szakály made this outrageous claim during a radio roundtable discussion, “The Royal Hungarian Army, Gendarmerie, and the Holocaust,” on October 8, 2013. An abbreviated transcript of the discussion was published in the October 23, 2013 online issue of *Népszava*, Budapest, and in the November 8, 2013 edition of the New York-based *Amerikai Magyar Népszava*. For some details on the Hungarian soldiers' involvement in the mass murder of the Jewish labor servicemen in Doroshich, in rebuttal to Szakály's distortions, see Daniel Lőwy, “Valójában mi is történt Dorosicsban?” [What did in reality happen in Doroshich?], *Kritika*, Budapest, 43 (January–February 2014), 1–2: 2–6. See also Braham, *Politics*, 333–34.

were illegally in the country.⁸² What many assess as the falsification drive of the past few years was directed not only against the historical reality of the Holocaust era but also toward the distortion of the antisemitic record of the Horthy regime prior to the German occupation.⁸³

What many cannot help but see as the Orbán government's *real* objectives in connection with the commemorative year were revealed within less than three weeks into 2014. On January 17, it announced its decision to erect a monument in commemoration of the German occupation of Hungary on March 19, 1944. The statue, depicting the crushing of Archangel Gabriel, symbolizing Hungary, by Germany's imperial eagle, was planned to be erected on Szabadság (Freedom) Square and unveiled on the seventieth anniversary of the beginning of the occupation.⁸⁴ The decision on the statue was a logical sequel to the deceitful preamble to the new constitution. Both of these measures by the Orbán government cannot plausibly be seen as anything but evidence of a wish to absolve Hungary of any responsibility for the Holocaust by denying its close and fruitful alliance with Nazi Germany, by identifying all casualties of the Second World War—the Jews who were destroyed with the involvement of Horthy's regime, the soldiers who died on the battlefields, and the civilians who were killed by enemy fire—as victims of the Germans.

⁸² For details on the tragedy of the “alien” Jews, see *ibid.*, 207–14.

⁸³ As part of the commemoration year, the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration (Közigazgatási és Igazságügyi Minisztérium [KIM]) announced plans for the organization of a mobile exhibition titled “Famous Hungarians in the Great World” (Híres magyarok a nagyvilágban) that would focus attention on twenty-one Jews who had become famous after leaving Hungary. The announcement emphasized that these Jews had left the country “in order to advance their knowledge and talent abroad, raising thereby the Hungarians’ reputation in the world.” This announcement falsifies the history of the Horthy era not only by limiting the number of the Jewish scholars and scientists who were compelled by the anti-Jewish laws to study abroad, but also by ignoring the large number of Hungarian-Jewish scholars and artists who were murdered during the Holocaust (Miklós Hernádi, “Emlékezik a KIM” [The KIM remembers], *Élet és Irodalom*, Budapest, February 7, 2014).

⁸⁴ The decision on the plans for the statue was reached without the involvement of any historians. See the letter by Professor Attila Pók, secretary of the Magyar Történelmi Társulat (Hungarian Historical Association), dated January 21, 2014, and addressed to János Lázár in *Múlt és Jövő*, Budapest, 2013/4, 20. To substantiate his complaint, Pók attached a listing of the six historical realities relating to the consequences of the German occupation noted by Krisztián Ungváry in his “Az eleven borzalom” [The living horror], *HVG.Hu*, January 21, 2014.

Originally applauding the government's Holocaust remembrance plans, the leaders of the Jewish community became apprehensive by late 2013. Aware of Mária Schmidt's record, they first expressed their concerns over her suitability in building the Józsefvárosi Holocaust Museum. András Heisler, the president of Mazsihisz, expressed his apprehensions over her record of relativizing the Holocaust vis-à-vis the horrors of Communism; he emphasized the uniqueness of the tragedy of the Jews during the Holocaust.⁸⁵ Specific demands relating to the planned Museum were made during the December 2013 assembly of the Jewish Community of Budapest (Budapesti Zsidó Hitközség [BZSH]), led by Péter Tordai. Distrustful of Schmidt's suitability, the leaders of the community requested that her advisory committee be expanded through the inclusion of their own nominees⁸⁶—a request, reportedly, that she refused to honor.⁸⁷

The Jewish community leaders' concerns over Schmidt's plans for the new Holocaust museum—plans scheduled to be realized by April 2014—were compounded by their shock over Szakály's distortions of history, and by their distress over the government's decision to build a statue that essentially would ignore Hungary's active involvement in the Holocaust. In a public statement distributed by MTI (Magyar Távirati Iroda [Hungarian News Service]) on January 19, they demanded not only the resignation of Szakály, but also issued a veiled warning:

The leaders of Mazsihisz request the representatives of political public life to prevent the seventieth anniversary of the Hungarian Holocaust from becoming part of the electoral campaign and to stop all attempts at the rewriting of our past history. If Hungary's government is serious about historically facing up to the Holocaust, it must immediately stop the ruinous and offensive processes that question the legitimacy of the series of

⁸⁵ *Új Élet*, January 15, 2014.

⁸⁶ The Jewish leaders requested the inclusion of Chief Rabbi Alfred Schöner; Imre Lebovits as representative of the survivors; Tamás Ungvári, the literary historian; Zoltán Vági, the Holocaust specialist; and Zsuzsanna Toronyi, the archivist of the Hungarian Jewish Archives (Magyar Zsidó Levéltár) (*ibid.*).

⁸⁷ Perhaps in light of the criticism surrounding her activities, in early February 2014, Mária Schmidt contacted me and several other well-known scholars, including Professors István Deák and Mária M. Kovács, requesting that we—as experts in the field—assist her work on the construction of the Józsefvárosi Museum by offering constructive suggestions. I decided not to respond.

events relating to the 2014 remembrance. ... Mazsihisz will use the funds awarded it from the Civic Fund only if the series of remembrance events are returned to the path acceptable by our community.⁸⁸

The following day Heisler addressed a formal letter to Prime Minister Orbán regarding the Jewish community's concerns. In his response of January 22, the prime minister assured Mr. Heisler of his government's determination to defend the interests of the Jewish community while restating his resolve to build the statue, insisting that one could not overlook the fate of those (i.e., the Christian Magyars) "who were imprisoned, dragged away, or murdered." Citing the new Hungarian Constitution, he implied that these victims were to be honored and remembered just like "your community's losses."

The uproar over the statue and the Holocaust-denigrating activities of the state-supported history-cleansers became considerably louder following the publication of an open letter that I addressed to the leaders of the Holocaust Memorial Center on January 26, 2014.⁸⁹ Picked up by several news services, the letter was published and commented upon in a large number of newspapers and periodicals in Hungary and many other

⁸⁸ "Szakály Sándor lemondását követeli a Mazsihisz" [Mazsihisz demands the resignation of Sándor Szakály], *Népszabadság*, Budapest, January 19, 2014. In an interview published in the January 22 issue of the daily ("Történész, kezében szivaccsal" [Historian with a sponge in his hand]), I expressed my support for Mazsihisz's position, identifying Szakály's distortions of the Holocaust era by referring to the saying: "Behind every tyrant with a sword there's a historian with a sponge."

⁸⁹ I addressed my open letter to György Haraszi and Szabolcs Szita, the top leaders of the Holocaust Memorial Center, requesting that my name be removed from the HMC's Library and Information Center (Téka és Információs Központ). I also announced my decision to return the Medium Cross of the Order of the Republic of Hungary, together with the scroll signed by President Pál Schmitt, which I received in October 2011. I resolved to act not only in protest against the shocking Holocaust-denigrating activities at the very start of the Holocaust remembrance year, but also in reaction to the questionable activities of the HMC, including the active involvement of its leaders in the Mária Schmidt-led planning of the Sorsok Háza and in the organization of a conference on January 27, 2014, to which they also invited Sándor Szakály. For details on the conference, see "Katolikusok voltak a holokauszt áldozatai?" [Were the victims of the Holocaust Catholic?], *Amerikai Magyar Népszava Online*, January 23, 2014.

parts of the world, galvanizing those dedicated to the preservation of the historical truth.⁹⁰

Disturbed over the government-condoned drive to falsify the history of the Holocaust, the leaders of some of the local Jewish congregations and communal organizations decided not to avail themselves of the grants that were allocated to them from the Civic Fund.⁹¹ The same decision was taken by a number of individual grant awardees.⁹² The ire over Orbán's unyielding position on the statue was also shared by many Christians.⁹³

In an attempt to restore calm, János Lázár decided to convene a "Jewish Communal Roundtable" (Zsidó Közösségi Kerekasztal) on February 6.⁹⁴ Apparently, the Jewish representatives had been left unconvinced by Lázár, who claimed that "it was important to identify the facts that might lead closer to the question of responsibility." Ignoring the fact

⁹⁰ A declaration of support for my stand was published in the January 31, 2014, issue of *Népszava*. It was signed by well-known writers, professionals, and theologians, including István Deák, Ágnes Heller, Gábor Iványi, László Karsai, György Konrád, Judit Molnár, József Schweitzer, Krisztián Ungváry, and Mária Vásárhelyi. A declaration in support of the protest by the Hungarians was published by a number of foreign scholars specializing in various aspects of Hungarian history on February 2. Among the signers were Eva S. Balogh, Yehuda Bauer, Holly Case, Tim Cole, Christian Gerlach, Eleonore Lappin-Eppel, Julia Richers, and Georg Sessler.

⁹¹ The first to act in this respect, on January 28, 2014, was the Jewish Congregation of Érsekújvár (Nové Zámky). It was followed by that of Nyíregyháza, and a number of foundations. See *Új Élet*, Budapest, February 15, 2014. However, one must also recognize the fact that a considerable number of Civic Fund recipients had used their grants for the proper remembrance of the seventieth anniversary of the Holocaust in Hungary.

⁹² One of the most notable among these was Róbert Garai, the actor-playwright, who decided not to avail himself of the 2.5 million forints awarded him by the Civic Fund (*Szombat Online*, February 11, 2014).

⁹³ Rudolf Ungváry, the noted Hungarian writer, for example, asserted that if "Mazsihisz and the other Jewish and non-Jewish organizations continued, in light of the issue of the statue, to cooperate to any degree in the state-organized Holocaust year, then this could not be compared to the cowardice of the wartime Jewish Council because at that time its members were fearful for their lives" ("Ungváry Rudolf a holokauszt-emlékév bojkottjáról" [Rudolf Ungváry on the boycott of the Holocaust memorial year], *Magyar Narancs Online*, January 25, 2014).

⁹⁴ Among those who decided not to attend was Rabbi Slomó Köves, head of the United Hungarian Jewish Congregation (Egységes Magyarországi Izraelita Hittközség).

that the Hungarian authorities in 1944 had played a decisive role in the destruction of the Jews, the state secretary, defending the planned erection of the statue, declared that “it would be a falsification of history to claim that Hungary did not lose its sovereignty following the occupation of March 19, 1944.”⁹⁵

The leaders of Mazsihisz found themselves in a bind. Clearly committed to the preservation of the historical record of the Holocaust, they also were mindful of their responsibility to the central and local Jewish communities for maintaining the various religious, cultural, and charity organizations and institutions—a responsibility they could fulfill only with the financial support of the government.⁹⁶ The government’s adamant position on their demands induced these leaders to consider the possibility of boycotting the commemorative events. Under pressure from representatives of communal, social, religious, and cultural organizations, the leaders decided to convene an extraordinary general assembly—an unprecedented event in the 150-year history of Hungarian Jewry.⁹⁷

In an unusual display of unity, at the meeting held on February 9, the delegates voted 72 to 2 with three abstentions in passing a resolution (No. 1/2014.02.09) that authorized Mazsihisz to abstain from participating in the state-sponsored 2014 Holocaust Remembrance events unless the government agreed to:

1. Stop work on the Józsefvárosi Museum because the community’s experts were still left in the dark about its historical conceptions and the project leader [Mária Schmidt] has in effect failed to cooperate
2. Remove Sándor Szakály as head of VERITAS because his public and professional declarations made him unsuitable for that position

⁹⁵ See “Lázár: a jövő héten ad választ Orbán Viktor a Zsidó Közösségi Kerekasztalon felmerült kérdésekre” [Lázár: The Jewish Community Roundtable to answer questions raised by Viktor Orbán next week], *mazsihisz.hu*, February 6, 2014, <http://www.mazsihisz.hu/vakbarat.php?nid=6793>.

⁹⁶ For a perceptive analysis of the Jewish leaders’ predicament, see Mátyás, Eörsi, “Keretek és korlátok. A Mazsihisz külső és belső harcairól” [Framework and limits: On Mazsihisz’s outer and inner battles], *Magyar Narancs*, Budapest, February 20, 2014.

⁹⁷ Personal communication by Dr. János Kőbányai, the editor and publisher of *Múlt és Jövő*, January 31, 2014.

3. Stop the erection of a statue relating to the German occupation because its symbol would contribute to the deflection of national responsibility for the Holocaust⁹⁸

The position of Mazsihisz was publicly supported not only by a group of Hungarian Christians, but also by the leaders of several international Jewish organizations.⁹⁹ Its wisdom was questioned primarily by the enthusiasts of Orbán's national-Christian policies.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ "Mazsihisz: Példa nélküli egység!" [Mazsihisz: Unprecedented unity!], *Új Élet*, Budapest, February 15, 2014. Mazsihisz's stand was also supported by a group of Christians: "Magyar keresztényként felemeljük hangunkat a múlt meghamisítása ellen" [We raise our voice as Christian Hungarians against the falsification of the past], *mazsihisz.hu*, February 24, 2014, <http://www.mazsihisz.hu/2014/02/24>.

⁹⁹ In his March 19, 2013, testimony before the US Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe ("The Trajectory of Democracy: Why Hungary Matters"), Paul A. Shapiro, director of the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, provided a fully documented overview of the changing political climate in Hungary, emphasizing the drive to bring about the rehabilitation of the Horthy era and the concurrent attacks on the memory of the Holocaust. See also "Magyar keresztényként felemeljük hangunkat a múlt meghamisítása ellen" [We raise our voice as Christian Hungarians against the falsification of the past], *mazsihisz.hu*, February 24, 2014, <http://www.mazsihisz.hu/2014/02/24>. On February 10, 2014, Rabbi Andrew Baker, a senior official of the American Jewish Committee, urged the Orbán administration to respond to the Jewish community's concerns without delay, emphasizing that it now has "an opportunity to openly confront Hungary's past and responsibility." In an op-ed published in *Népszabadság* on February 15, Ronald Lauder, the president of the World Jewish Congress, expressed his support for the stand taken by Mazsihisz, emphasizing that the Hungarian government must do more in acknowledging the role the wartime regime of Horthy had played, in collaboration with the Nazis, in the destruction of the Jews. On February 13, the Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned Andor Nagy, Hungary's ambassador, to express its concerns over Hungary's failure to deal truthfully with the past. Rafi Schutz, the ministry's deputy director general for Europe, expressed his anxiety over Hungarian trends to rewrite the history of the Holocaust and of the role Horthy had played in it. Schutz referred specifically to the conference that was held at the House of Terror on December 6, 2013, during which the two Horthy apologists, Mária Schmidt and László Tőkéczy, defended Horthy and his policies.

¹⁰⁰ Minister of Human Resources Zoltán Balog expressed his disappointment over Mazsihisz's decision, citing it as shortsighted, emphasizing that the dispute is

A day after the general assembly's historic decision, the Mazsihisz leaders forwarded a conciliatory letter to Prime Minister Orbán. Signed by András Heisler, Péter Tordai, and Gusztáv Zoltai, the leaders suggested, among other things, that instead of the controversial Schmidt-led Józsefvárosi Museum another institution—a House of Coexistence (Együttélés Háza) devoted to the symbiosis of Jewish and non-Jewish culture—should be built. While ignoring their earlier concerns over Szakály's activities, they also suggested that a dialogue be held over the planned statue commemorating the German occupation, arguing that the conflicts surrounding it “harm our homeland, Hungary.” Presumably designed not to further exacerbate the conflict, the letter was considered “wise” by some and as sycophantic and treacherous by others.¹⁰¹

Orbán's long-awaited response came on February 19. While acknowledging the “constructive” tone of their letter, he reminded the Jewish leaders about the initiatives he had taken in support of Holocaust remembrance, including the establishment of the Holocaust Memorial Center and the designation of April 16 as the day of Holocaust remembrance. However, he failed to refer to any of the specific suggestions by the Jewish leaders and instead suggested that in light of the electoral campaign that officially began on February 15, the proposed dialogue be postponed until after the Easter holidays.

Lázár's reaction to Mazsihisz's stand was more bellicose. He lashed out at the Jewish leaders, identifying their “ultimatum”—something these leaders never gave—as a potential danger wrecking the government's plans for the commemoration of the Holocaust. He also charged them with “fomenting discord between Hungarians and Jews who have lived in unity

not only between the Jewish leadership and the government, but that it also involves the 10 million Hungarians. He also cited the “positive” actions taken by the Orbán administration (*Szombat Online*, February 10, 2014).

¹⁰¹ Among the leaders' severest critics was Tamás Suchman, a former Mazsihisz vice president. In an electronic letter to the delegates, he identified the leaders as liars and traitors, who went counter to the decision taken by the general assembly: “Suchman szerint a Mazsihisz vezetői hazudnak” [According to Suchman the Mazsihisz leaders are lying], *Amerikai Népszava Online*, February 13, 2014. For a very critical overview, see “A Mazsihisz vezetősége elárulta közgyűlése határozatát” [Mazsihisz's leadership betrayed the decision of its assembly], *Népszava/Szabadság*, New York, February 21, 2014.

and symbiosis for centuries,” cynically “overlooking” the horrors of the Horthy era that culminated in the Holocaust.¹⁰²

The chances for resolving the fundamental issues dividing the Jewish community and the Orbán government are slim. The government decided to follow a wait-and-see policy until after the elections scheduled for April 6. Having again won a two-thirds majority in parliament, Prime Minister Orbán proceeded with his plan to bring about the rehabilitation of the Horthy era by placing exclusive responsibility for the Holocaust onto the Germans.¹⁰³ While continuing to pay lip-service to his commitment to fight antisemitism and commemorate the Holocaust “in the context of Hungary’s own suffering under German and Soviet occupation,” he disregarded the three specific demands expressed by the extraordinary general assembly of the Jewish community on February 9.¹⁰⁴

In connection with the “House of Fates” project, Prime Minister Orbán decided to defy the Jewish leaders’ demand, continuing to place his trust in Mária Schmidt.¹⁰⁵ The Mazsihisz leaders continued to mistrust Schmidt because of her relativistic views on the Holocaust and her “secretive” plans about the contents of the exhibition. According to a

¹⁰² “The Hungarian Holocaust Memorial Year: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back,” <http://hungarianspectrum.org/2014/02/27/the-hungarian-holocaust-memorial-year-one-step-forward-two-steps-backward/>, February 28, 2014. See also Mária M. Kovács, “Kettős beszéd: holokauszt- emlékév és Horthy-rehabilitáció” [Double talk: The Holocaust Memorial Year and the rehabilitation of Horthy], *Galamus*, March 7, 2014, http://www.galamus.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=364077_kettos_beszed_holokauszt_emlekev_es_horthy; and István Sebestyén and Marie-Rose Makki, “Érik a botrány” [The scandal is growing], *Hetek*, Budapest, 18 (February 28, 2014), 9: 14–15.

¹⁰³ For details, see “Orbán: A megszállási emlékmű a nemzet fájdalmát fejezi ki” [Orbán: The occupation statue expresses the nation’s pain], *Mandiner*, July 21, 2014, http://mandiner.hu/cikk/20140721_orban_a_megszallasi_emlekmu_a_nemzet_fajdalmat_fejezi_ki; Richard Field, “Magyar holokauszt emléknep: Orbán Viktor levele Heiszler Andrásnak, a Mazsihisz elnökének” [Hungarian Holocaust Memorial Day: Viktor Orbán’s letter to András Heiszler, the President of Mazsihisz], *Budapest Beacon*, April 16, 2014, <http://hu.budapestbeacon.com/kiemelt-cikkek/magyar-holokauszt-emleknep/>.

¹⁰⁴ “Mazsihisz: Példa nélküli egység! A rendkívüli közgyűlés határozata” [Mazsihisz: Unprecedented unity! The resolution of the extraordinary general assembly], *Új Élet*, Budapest, February 15, 2014.

¹⁰⁵ In an attempt to find a compromise solution, on April 30, 2014, András Heiszler and Péter Tordai, the senior-most leaders of Hungarian Jewry, met Orbán and some of his advisers, including János Lázár and Zoltán Balog. The meeting was essentially fruitless.

press report published by MTI on July 31, a possible compromise solution might be reached on this thorny issue. At a meeting held that day with the participation of Sir Andrew Burns, the head of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA); Rabbi Andrew Baker of the American Jewish Committee; András Heisler; György Haraszti, the chairman of the board of HDC; and Mária Schmidt, it was decided to establish an international working group that would cooperate in the realization of the museum. This group, envisioned to consist of academic experts, was expected to work in cooperation with IHRA and the already existing International Advisory Body in evaluating the historical context and the content of the House of Fates. The participants also agreed on future cooperation between the HDC and the House of Fates: The HDC will continue to house the permanent exhibition on the Holocaust and to serve mainly as a center for research and documentation; the House of Fates will offer exhibitions directed toward young people while also serving as a center for education and training.

At the end of the meeting, Sir Andrew Burns issued a statement, declaring, among other things:

Contrary to media reports, IHRA will not be in a position to endorse the House of Fates concept until the consultations with the national and international experts as well as with the Hungarian Jewish Community have been taken into account. Dr. Heisler has published a letter to Dr. Schmidt about the points of concern to the Jewish community which are shared by IHRA. Close cooperation with Mazsihisz is not only desirable but essential in ensuring the integrity of the project.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ "Federation of Jewish Communities (Mazsihisz) versus Mária Schmidt," *Hungarian Spectrum*, August 11, 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.org/tag/federation-of-jewish-communities/>. See also "Kompromisszum a Sorsok Háza ügyében?" [Compromise regarding the fate of the House of Fate?], *Szombat*, July 31, 2014, <http://www.szombat.org/politika/kompromisszum-a-sorsok-haza-ugyeben>. While the Sorsok Háza, originally scheduled to open on April 16, 2014, was still far from ready by the end of December, the conflict between Schmidt and the Mazsihisz leaders and her other opponents has continued unabated. Schmidt has continued to blame everybody but herself for the persistence of the conflict. See her self-serving account of the conflict coupled with her distorted "vision of Jewish-non-Jewish relations as a love affair" in a long article titled "Love Story," published in *Heti Válasz*, Budapest, October 7, 2014.

Only the future will tell whether the implied warning by Sir Andrew was heeded. As to Sándor Szakály, the leaders of Mazsihisz appear to have given up on their original request to have him dismissed as head of VERITAS. He continues to enjoy the support of his mentor, former prime minister Péter Boross, and of the Orbán government. Preceding the IHRA-sponsored agreement of July 31 relating to the cooperative arrangement between the HDC and the House of Fates, Szakály managed to expand the scope of his “academic” operations by entering into a formal cooperative relationship with the HDC. On April 26, 2014, Szakály and György Haraszti—to the dismay of many Hungarians, especially Jews—signed an agreement stipulating, among other things, that VERITAS and the HDC—both government-financed institutions—would cooperate in the organization of conferences, in the launching of research projects, and in the publication of monographs.¹⁰⁷

As to the so-called Gabriel statue, all of Mazsihisz’s attempts to block its erection failed. In spite of its many pleas and maneuverings to protect the historical integrity of the Holocaust, Prime Minister Orbán remained steadfast in his plans to have it erected. In his reasoning the statue was an essential reminder of Hungary’s victimization during the Second World War and of its innocence in the destruction of Hungarian Jewry. For tactical reasons, he placed the whole issue on hold until after the elections of April 6. Following Fidesz’s landslide electoral victory and Orbán’s inauguration for his second full term on May 11, the plans for the erection of the statue proceeded unabated. He was deterred neither by the protestations of local Jewish and Christian public figures¹⁰⁸ nor by an appeal by

¹⁰⁷ The Szakály–Haraszti agreement aroused the ire of many Hungarians, especially the Jews. As part of that agreement, a conference on the rescuers and the Righteous was scheduled to take place on December 16, 2014, with the participation of historians as well as political and ecclesiastical figures, including László Kövér, Bishop László Kiss-Rigó, György Haraszti, Mária Schmidt, Dorottya Bacsoni, and Bishop István Bogárdi Szabó.

¹⁰⁸ Among those protesting were the leaders of the Hungarian Federation of Resistance [Fighters] and Anti-Fascists (Magyar Ellenállók és Antifasiszták Szövetsége). In a letter dated May 20, 2014, they asked the prime minister to prevent the erection of the statue. Among the most outspoken critics of the statue have been Imre Mécs, an 81-year-old former opposition lawmaker, and his wife, Fruzsina Magyar. Mazsihisz’s efforts proved basically fruitless not only because of its relative lack of power but also because of internal conflicts between the national leaders and those of the Jewish Congregation of Budapest. These conflicts were partially reflected by the forced resignation in April 2014 of Guszáv Zoltai, the executive director of Mazsihisz. In September 2014, Zoltai accepted

members of the US Congress.¹⁰⁹ Because of the controversy surrounding it, the statue was erected under the protection of the police around midnight, Saturday, July 19–20.¹¹⁰

By December 2014, the government's plans for the commemoration of the seventieth anniversary of the Holocaust appear to be doomed to failure. Orbán's major objective—to use many of the commemorative events as means for the possible absolution of Hungary from any responsibility for the destruction of the Jews—had become transparent. Many Jewish congregations and organizations have decided against participating in the government-sponsored memorial events and returned the grants they had received from the Civic Fund. Two of the most important Hungarian literary organizations have also decided to refuse the funding: the József Attila Kör and the Szépirók Társasága.¹¹¹

Unfortunately, the chance for reconciliation has again been missed. The hopes that Lázár's statement of January 1, 2013, had aroused among people of goodwill—Jews and Christians alike—were dashed once again. One can only speculate about the general and Holocaust-related policies of the Orbán government during its remaining years in power. Judging by its record of the past few years and the prime minister's resolve to trans-

an official governmental appointment as János Lázár's adviser on Jewish affairs. For details on Zoltai's background and his new position, see *Hungarian Spectrum*, September 11, 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.org/2014/09/11/gusztav-zoltai-former-coo-of-mazsihisz-is-now-janos-lazars-adviser-on-jewish-affairs/>; and Cnaan Liphshiz, "Hungary Jewish Leader Gusztav Zoltai Denounced as 'Traitor,'" *Forward*, New York, November 7, 2014.

¹⁰⁹ In response to an appeal signed by thirty Jewish members of both houses of the US Congress, Prime Minister Orbán, in a letter dated June 4, 2014, tried to convince the American legislators that the statue to which they had objected was "a freedom-fighting people's memorial of the pain of having its liberty crushed. The monument paying tribute to the memory of the victims, reminds us all that the loss of our national sovereignty led to tragic consequences, claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands, and brought immense suffering upon further millions, the entire nation."

¹¹⁰ The statue has not been officially inaugurated yet. One day after the erection of the statue, János Lázár, an official in charge of the prime minister's office, declared: "There won't be an inauguration. The government, sensing the controversy that has enveloped the monument, doesn't want to hurt the personal feelings of anyone" (Zoltán Simon, "Orbán Skips Nazi-Invasion Statue Inauguration after Row," *Bloomberg.com*, July 21, 2014, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-07-21/orban-won-t-inaugurate-nazi-invasion-monument-after-row>).

¹¹¹ See Gábor Czene, "Így nem kell pénz a kormánytól" [Government funding not wanted under such circumstances], *Szombat*, March 1, 2014, <http://www.szombat.org/hirek-lapszemle/igy-nem-kell-penz-a-kormanytol>.

form Hungary into an “illiberal democracy,”¹¹² one is bound to conclude the chances for a cathartic resolution of the Holocaust-related conflict remain fundamentally slim.

★ ★ ★

The antisemitic and Holocaust-denigrating developments in Hungary since the systemic change in 1989 have shocked many people of good will—Jews and Christians alike. For a short while immediately after the end of the Second World War it was generally believed that the Holocaust would put an end to the age-old scourge of antisemitism. Elie Wiesel, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate, once believed that the memory of the Holocaust would shame all those who were proud of their antisemitism. He recently admitted that he was wrong. In Hungary this is largely due to the history-cleansing policies that state and government leaders have pursued since the end of the Communist regime. The distortion, denigration, and actual denial of the Holocaust represent a new danger to the Jewish people. This danger was eloquently summarized in late January 2014 by Ilan Mor, Israel’s ambassador to Budapest:

The six million victims of the Shoah were murdered twice: The first time, when they were physically exterminated seventy years ago, and they are murdered once more, when the memory of their fate is distorted and erased. Holocaust denial in its various forms is an expression of antisemitism. Any attempt to deny the genocide of the Jews is an effort to exonerate the Nazi ideology and antisemitism from guilt or responsibility in the genocide of

¹¹² Prime Minister Orbán outlined his views in a speech delivered on July 26, 2014, before an ethnic Hungarian audience in Băile Tușnad (Tusnádfürdő in Hungarian), a small town in neighboring Romania. Citing as models Singapore, China, India, Turkey and Russia, Orbán proclaimed his intention to turn Hungary, a member of both NATO and the European Union, into a state that in character is not of liberal nature. His views were severely criticized at home and abroad and even elicited a negative editorial in the *Washington Post*. According to the editorial, “what Mr. Orbán portrays as a new post-crisis political model is little more than the same authoritarian nationalism practiced by thugs and charlatans throughout the twentieth century—including Hungary’s pro-Nazi World War II regime” (“Hungary’s ‘Illiberalism’ Should Not Go Unchallenged,” *Washington Post*, August 16, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/hungarys-illiberalism-should-not-go-unchallenged/2014/08/16/b2dc72d4-1e5c-11e4-82f9-2cd6fa8da5c4_story.html).

the Jewish people. Any attempts to rewrite or to reinterpret the history of the Shoah, in this country or elsewhere, for any reason, politically and/or ideologically, are part of the deplorable attempt to deny the Holocaust, the Shoah.

A similar sentiment was expressed by Wiesel, focusing on the special responsibilities of the survivors:

[A survivor's] duty is to bear witness for the dead and for the living. He has no right to deprive future generations of a past that belongs to our collective memory. To forget would be not only dangerous but offensive; to forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time.¹¹³

The antisemitic assault on memory is fraught with danger: without memory there is no history and without history there is no national-ethnic continuity. One is reminded of the party slogan in George Orwell's *1984*: "Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past." History is a formidable weapon. It is particularly corruptive and dangerous in the hands of chauvinistic nationalists bent on shaping history. Unless the historical revisionists and the history-cleansers are unmasked and counteracted, the record of the Holocaust inevitably will be tarnished, if not obliterated. One must protect the integrity of this record in order that the world—the current and future generations—may learn its lessons and thereby avoid another cataclysm.

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The Holocaust in Hungary represented a unique chapter in the singular history of the Final Solution of the “Jewish question” in Europe. In the fifth year of the Second World War Hungary still had a Jewish population of approximately 800,000.

Although this large and relatively intact Jewish community was deprived of its basic rights as citizens, had suffered close to 62,000 casualties, had been confronted with the hardships of discrimination, and had endured the vicissitudes of a military-related labor service system, it continued to enjoy relative physical safety under the aristocratic-conservative regime of Hungary until the German occupation on March 19, 1944. How was all this possible? And if all this was possible until March 1944, why could it not continue for a few more months? Was it really inevitable that hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews would, within a few months, become victims of the gas chambers of Auschwitz? Could the Holocaust in Hungary have been averted and who were responsible for the violent deaths of over a half a million Hungarian Jews in the ghettos, on the deportation trains, in the extermination and concentration camps, during the death marches, and the mass shootings into the Danube? Starting from these difficult questions, the present volume offers readers the most recent scholarship on the history and memory of the Holocaust in Hungary.

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